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TENTH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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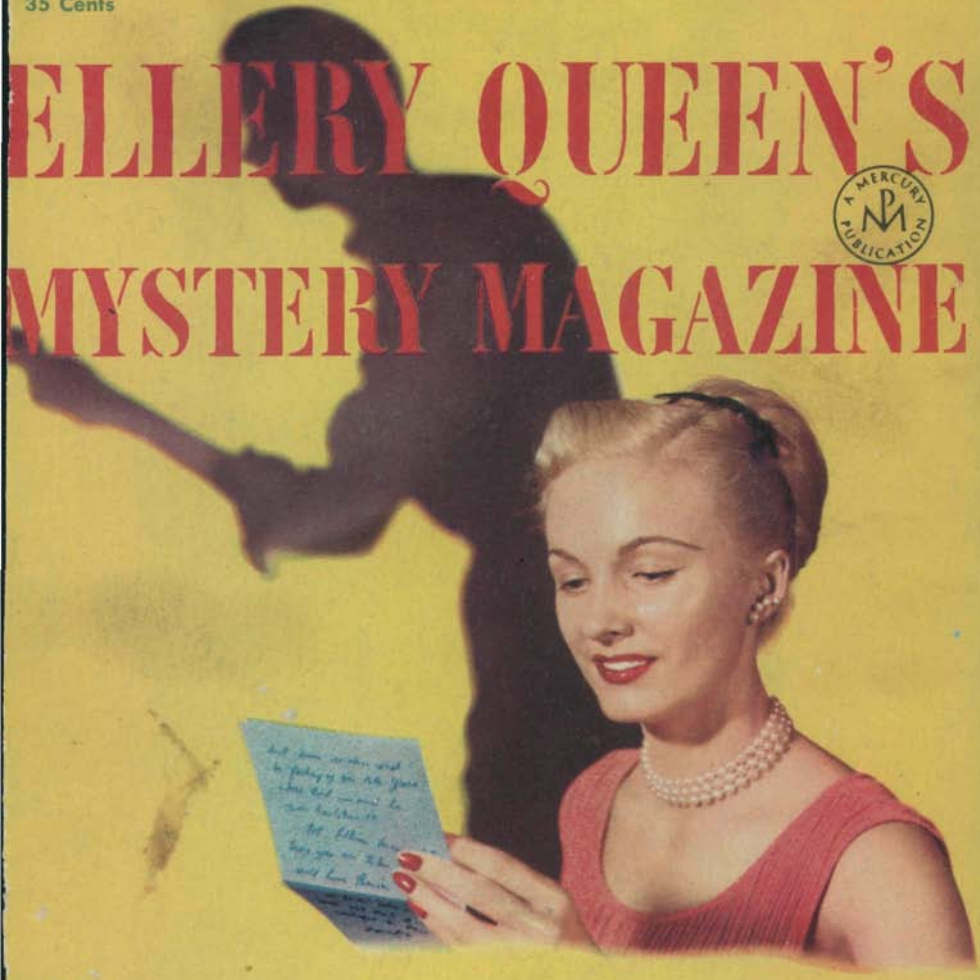

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The Grave of Brimstone Billy	GEORGE BERNARD SHAW
Danger in the Shadows	THOMAS WALSH
The Exact Opposite	ERLE STANLEY GARDNER
The MWA Murder	ROBERT ARTHUR

also THE HAYCRAFT-QUEEN DEFINITIVE LIBRARY OF DETECTIVE FICTION, *and other stories*

AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES, NEW AND OLD

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GET HIM OUT OF THIS

by ERNEST DUDLEY

The Problem of the Precipice

The Crown Prince of Sylvania wires an S.O.S. to Snip Carton, fearless Insurance Agent, to retrieve the fabulous jewel collection which has been stolen from the royal castle, high in the mountains of Sylvania. On the way, Snip Carton is ambushed and beaten to a pulp by Spanish Juan, the notorious bandit chief, and his cutthroat gang. Secretly in league with the Crown Prince's cousin, Black Mark —who is the real thief—Spanish Juan is smuggling the jewels out of the country to a fence. Snip Carton fights his way out of the bandit's den, however, and reaches a narrow path which winds through towering cliffs above a deep ravine. Nearing a curve round the cliff-face, he hears the bandits behind him in full cry. Alarmed, he turns to press on—and there, veering around the curve at full speed, is Black Mark crouched behind the wheel of a huge old-fashioned car which takes up the entire width of the path. At the same time a noise like thunder fills the air, and Snip Carton looks up to see an avalanche of great boulders come crashing down towards him at a terrifying speed . . .

So there's Snip Carton, trapped on the edge of a bottomless chasm, the murderous wheels of a car bearing down on him from one side, a band of bloodthirsty outlaws racing up from the other, and a mass of rocks roaring down on him from above. Certain death awaits him unless you *GET HIM OUT OF THIS!* For the true solution to our hero's perilous problem, turn to page 64.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

TENTH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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Another story by Thomas Walsh whose NIGHTMARE IN MANHATTAN *won the coveted "Edgar," awarded by Mystery Writers of America for the best first novel published in 1950 . . . and this story, "Danger in the Shadows," partially explains why* NIGHTMARE IN MANHATTAN *was so popular. For Thomas Francis Morgan Walsh has written for nearly every magazine in America, both pulp and slick, and he has written nearly every type of detective-crime-adventure short story from the purely deductive to the thriller to the suspense to the human interest to the tale of character, mood, and background. . . . We have already given you divers detective stories from the versatile mind of Thomas Walsh — hardboiled yarns from his early pulp days, semi-hardboiled capers from his next period, not-too-tough cop stories from his slick successes. "Danger in the Shadows" is different from all these — in approach, in style, in emotional intent . . .*

DANGER IN THE SHADOWS

by THOMAS WALSH

IT WAS JAMES FRANCIS PHELAN WHO made the mistake, being very certain where Barbara was doubtful, and recognizing, without any doubt, stands and buildings and signposts she could not recall as those they had passed on their way in. But after they came to the exit gate and looked around for the parking lot that should have been just outside, even James Francis Phelan saw that he was wrong.

Barbara did not say that she could have told him so: she had been Mrs. James Francis Phelan just two days. But he caught her tired smile.

"Here," he said. "I can get the car back here by myself all right. You, honey — you go over to that bench there and take it easy for a while. When you see the old jalopy pull up by that traffic light come on out — but not before."

When he had deposited her on the bench by the exit gate, he touched her right wrist with concern and tenderness — a dark-haired young man, lean and well-shouldered, with a softness in his dark eyes when he looked at her.

"What's more," he said, "I'll have no carrying on with these city slickers while I'm gone. Mind now!"

"Silly," she said. But she couldn't help smiling at him.

"Silly, huh?" He held up her chin with his palm. "If that's the case — okay then. I'm not going to miss you at all. My heart won't be the least bit sore all the time I'm —"

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"All the time," she said, smiling still. "Twenty minutes, perhaps."

"Twenty years," James Francis Phelan told her solemnly. "Twenty ages, my girl. Twenty eternities."

He grinned and was off — James Francis Phelan, twenty-four, counselor at law of Atwood, Nebraska. His slim figure dwindled and vanished down the upright perspective of the Fair walls, blurred over now by the thickening shadows of dusk.

Mrs. James Francis Phelan, sitting primly by herself on the end of the bench, thought of what a — a dear idiot he was. She remembered the poems he had scribbled slapdash on long legal sheets and dispatched special delivery to her — all headed, quite naturally, "to Barbara." She even recalled indulgently how he had insisted on lunching solely on soup for two whole months to get enough labels to enter some silly contest.

James Francis Phelan hadn't thought it was silly; he was certain, no question at all about it, where the prize was going to land. But then — she sighed a bit — he was certain of so many things. The contest, the way he'd get on when the breaks came, the right gate out of the World's Fair just now — She smiled faintly to herself. She wouldn't have James Francis Phelan changed from what he was for anything in the world.

People passed in and out about her while she sat there and waited for him — hundreds of people, thousands of people. Cars shot by on the road before her, darkness gathered imperceptibly; she began to feel — how absurd it was! — very small, very lonely, very lost.

Sitting there, her hands folded in her lap, she had a delicate young face and clear brown eyes as grave and candid as a child's. She waited quietly for Jimmy to come back, depressed a little by the careless hurry of the crowd about her.

It was a relief, when the twenty minutes had passed, to get up and to walk from the bench to the winking traffic signal by the intersection. It must have taken him longer than he had imagined it would to find the brown coupé in all those countless others. She did not begin to worry until it was half-past eight and he had been gone an hour; then, standing on the edge of the curb, she began to watch anxiously the approaching cars.

At nine she told herself that she knew what it was — the roads, the gates, the traffic lights were all quite similar. Confused somehow, he'd be searching for her now at some other gate. Should she wait for him here, or should she go back to their room?

At nine thirty she flagged a cab. He would be home, of course, at the pleasant little house where they had found a room last night, worried sick because he'd missed her. Where else could he be? Something shone, vivid and pale, in her mind — she saw a crash, a narrow hospital room, James Francis Phelan limp in the bed.

But she would not let herself think of those things.

He was not waiting for her at the

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rooming house; there was no message from him. She pretended to the landlady that it was very funny and she told her what they'd seen that day at the Fair — the World of Tomorrow and the Perisphere and the Man-made Lightning and Television and the Railroad Exposition. But while she spoke, coldness was spreading inside her. He couldn't be — hurt. He couldn't be —

In their room upstairs she sat and turned over the pages of a magazine. Someone came in, up the stairs, and passed her door.

Eleven. Her throat felt dry; the quietness of the house and of the street deepened and pressed in her ears. Jimmy, Jimmy, Jimmy —

She got up and moved about the room. She was angry with him; worrying her like this and spoiling everything — making her imagine dreadful things and fret her heart out. Then the coldness swept through her body and shook it like a wind. Ten past eleven, twenty past eleven. Something rose in her throat; she held it down, her teeth forced together.

At twenty-five minutes to twelve, in the drugstore around the corner, a drug clerk looked curiously at her and told her the way to the police station.

When, at seven thirty that evening, James Francis Phelan walked into the right parking lot, a stocky man leaning against the fender of a black sedan two cars down from the brown coupé with the Nebraska license looked up at him briefly with stolid gray eyes. The pavement around the stocky man was littered with cigarette stubs; he had been waiting there three hours.

When he saw James Francis Phelan approach the brown coupé with his key in his hand, the stocky man straightened and glanced casually up and down the line of cars. There was no one, at the moment, near them.

The stocky man had a thought: why not here? Why not now? No need of a story to get him quietly out of the place; where could they find a better spot than this? He moved up almost idly and circled the back of the brown coupé; his hand came out from under his coat bearing something half as long as his forearm — soft, heavy, covered with cloth.

James Francis Phelan, bent slightly to get into the coupé, half turned in surprise when he felt the stocky man so close to him. He had a glimpse of the stolid face, the lips stretched a little, the gray eyes glittering and ugly. Then the sandbag smashed into the side of his skull very skillfully — hard enough, but not too hard; he slumped forward into the car and the stocky man helped him on with a shove of his arm.

It was done quickly, without a sound. With the ignition on, the car in gear, the stocky man swung it around in the open lane and headed it down for the gate. He stopped some yards before it, sheltered from the attendant by the last line of cars; he called, "Eddie," in a low voice.

Eddie appeared at once, around the side of a gray convertible. He opened

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the car door, straightened James Francis Phelan up in the seat, got in and held the limp figure erect by squeezing his own body against it. "Okay," he said then, his lips twitching nervously. "Okay, Arnold. Get us out of here fast."

They weren't stopped at the exit. They were just three men crowded together in a narrow coupé. Eddie sat with one arm around James Francis Phelan's shoulders. They went on through side streets for twenty minutes to a quiet thoroughfare of brick-row houses that had high stoops and open porches facing the road and squat white garage doors built in beneath the terraces. Halfway along that Arnold swung the car in on a driveway; Eddie got out and pulled up the garage door. Then the car rolled down gently and the door descended behind it.

In the garage Arnold grunted: "Easy now. Take his feet." Between them they carried James Francis Phelan through a narrow opening into a basement rumpus room beyond. They laid him on the couch there and Arnold stared down at him.

"I'll fix him up," he said. "I'll keep him nice and quiet. You go and get Fid English."

Fid English was out on a date. It was after eleven before he showed up with Eddie — at a time when, eighteen blocks away, Mrs. James Francis Phelan had looked out on an empty street. In the kitchen over the rumpus room Arnold sat moodily across the table from a slender man with a haggard white face, and eyes bright and black behind horn-rimmed spectacles. The slender man wore a blue suit and a stiff collar; his trousers were shiny along the seams.

When Fid English came in with Eddie, Arnold smiled thinly at him. "Frank Barber," he said, presenting him to Fid English with a prod of his thumb. "My sister's husband, Fid. Remember Dolly? She's away for the week end; drove down to Rockaway with some friends this afternoon. So we got this place all to ourselves."

"That's nice," Fid English said. He had a wide smile that expressed nothing. "Throwing a party, Arnold?"

"No party," Arnold said, smiling too. "Business, Fid. Big business, I'd say. Frank here works for Jansenius and Company — they make Grandma's Canned Soups. He's private secretary to Mr. Grandma Jansenius himself. For forty-seven-fifty a week."

"Forty-two-fifty," Frank Barber whispered. His lips twitched briefly in a small sharp motion. "Since the cut. With the house to pay on. With the car —"

"That's right," Arnold said. "Forty-two-fifty since the cut, Fid. This morning I run in to see Frank at the office to get a few bucks, but Frank ain't got any dough for me. Besides, he's all steamed up about something that just happened. He's so mad he confides in me, which he don't do ordinarily. Not Frankie.

"Grandma's Soups been running a contest. Twenty-five thousand bucks for fifty words on why you like their

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dishwater — for fifty words and fifty labels off their cans. The contest was over last week, Fid; this morning the guy in charge comes around to old Jansenius with the name of the guy they pick out as the winner. Frank's in there with the boss, doing some filing, but he's a pretty quiet guy, Frank is, and they don't happen to see him behind the cabinets. So —"

"I might be wood," Frank Barber said, throaty and low. "I might be —"

"All right," Arnold said. He looked angry. "Lemme talk, will you? The letter they picked out as the best was written by a guy named James Francis Phelan of Atwood, Nebraska. It's a big secret, understand; nobody but the advertising guy and old Jansenius is supposed to know it yet. They got some dope on him — they always check up to make sure the prize don't go to some tramp that will give the product a bad name. And the advertising guy gives Jansenius the dope they got on Phelan.

"He's a young guy, twenty-four, a year out of law school. Nice boy, clean liver, good family — just the kind of guy they want to boost their stuff. He ain't in Atwood now though — left there ten days ago to see a girl in Syracuse he went to college with, and to take in the World's Fair here. A vacation, understand."

Fid English listened silently. He was about James Francis Phelan's height and weight, with sullen-looking black eyes and slick black hair.

"This contest," Arnold said, "this contest they're going to pay off in cash — twenty-five grand in ten-dollar bills. Old Jansenius figures there'll be a hell of a bigger wallop in that than in just a check. When he hears this Phelan is coming to New York he thinks that's swell; he's got it all doped out how they can make every newsreel and tabloid in the country and get some swell publicity. As soon as Phelan gets here and registers at a hotel, they'll get hold of him and bring him down to the office and have his picture taken by every cameraman in town.

"Our angle, Fid — our angle is that they ain't got an idea in the world what this Phelan looks like. If somebody with his car, somebody with his driver's license, somebody with his name, checks in at a hotel tonight — sometime tomorrow that guy walks out of Jansenius' office with twenty-five thousand bucks in his mitts. Cash, Fid. Clean, understand. No way of tracing it back."

"So what?" Fid English asked. "What kind of a pipe dream you seein'? *If* we had his car — *if* we had his license —"

"We got 'em, Fid. We got him downstairs. As soon as I heard Frank's story, I figured this Phelan might be in New York already, because he left Nebraska ten days ago; only I think — why, maybe he ain't at any hotel, the only places old Jansenius tried to find him. How much dough do young lawyers make? Not much, I thought. And out around the Fair — remember what it looks like? Houses renting out rooms. Cheap. A buck or two a

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night. So if he was stopping out there — well, I took a chance. I got hold of Eddie right after I left Frank and we went out nosing through the parking lots at the Fair.

"For just a smell of twenty-five grand I'd cover every garage in New York. All me and Eddie had to lose was time. So — we got out there around noon. All we knew was that the guy, if he was inside, would have a Nebraska car — but even then it wasn't as tough as it seemed at first. Once we knew what a Nebraska license looked like we could cover a row in a couple of minutes or so.

"Every time we spotted one we went through it. And then after four hours we hit the right one; we know that because there's a gas bill from a garage in Atwood, Nebraska, stuck in the glove compartment and made out to J. F. Phelan. We hang around then; we take care of him when he comes out and get him out here.

"And there it is, Fid. Jansenius won't figure on a ringer; so far as he knows, himself and the advertising guy is the only two who have any idea of the winner's name. So he won't be suspicious. And this Phelan — he come East alone, understand. There's nobody with him to raise a stink if he don't come home tonight."

"Maybe I fit in somewhere," Fid English said. "Only I don't see any spot."

"You're his age," Arnold said. "You're his build. And you're handy with a pen. Say they make you sign something — why, you practice a little tonight and tomorrow you can put down his signature just like it's here on the license. See how it all fits in? They don't suspect anything crooked because they don't think the name of the winner is out. And they find you at a hotel — you don't find them. Who's gonna even think you ain't James Francis Phelan of Atwood, Nebraska? Who's —"

"Wait a minute," Fid English said. "They're gonna have my picture — those cameramen —"

"They sell dark glasses, don't they?" Arnold asked him. "If you had sore eyes after driving all that way East — where's anything funny in that, or in keeping them on against the lights? And Eddie here knows a guy that can change you so you wouldn't know yourself. He'll take you over there first thing in the morning. They'll have a picture — sure. But it won't be you. Not the way you look now."

"Nothin' goes wrong, huh?" Fid English said. He looked slightly worried. "It's always squab on toast talkin' about it. But —"

"You'll have his car," Arnold said. "You'll have his name and his license. And tonight you go in to the city and register at the Pilgrim House. Where's anything to trip you up? Here —" He took a pencil out of his pocket and looked around the table; his hand went out to a packet of matches, folded back the flap, and wrote a phone number on the inside.

"That's Frank's phone; he's only been livin' here two months so he ain't in the book yet. Call us up when

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you're settled — only not from the hotel. They might keep a list of the calls you make out from there and trace it here after the blowoff. Go out to a drugstore. We'll let you know how things are on this end."

"Meanin' him?" Fid English asked. He pointed one finger at the floor.

"We're goin' to worry about him," Arnold said. "We're goin' to worry about him a lot."

Fid English got up slowly.

"Okay," he said. "I'm in, Arnold. Where's his car?"

"Frank'll show you. We'll be waitin' for that call; make it" — he looked up at the clock — "make it about one. When we know that you're set we'll take care of the boy friend downstairs. Here's Frank's number."

The matches sailed through the air. At the doorway Fid English snapped them in with one hand and dropped them in his pocket.

It was getting on toward twelve when he drove off from the brick house in James Francis Phelan's car; some distance north, in the nearest precinct house, a heavy-faced man named Cassidy had done about everything by then a conscientious desk sergeant could do for a scared-looking girl who was worried about her husband. He checked on all the accidents and he covered all the hospitals, and when nothing turned up anywhere he was as comforting as possible.

There was no sense to worrying about it, Desk Sergeant Cassidy told her; maybe her husband had bumped into some friends from home and gone off somewhere for a couple of beers. Or perhaps he was still looking for her out at the Fair. If he was missing in the morning — well, it would be time enough to look for trouble then. Now she'd better go home.

"Thank you," Mrs. Phelan said in her soft voice. "Thank you very much. That would be best, wouldn't it? Of course he'll be —"

She turned quickly, with a set smile on her lips, and went out. Cassidy stared after her, vaguely troubled. How long, he wondered, was she out of high school? A nice sweet girl like that —

She stayed in his mind. He tried to picture the kind of man that would leave her alone to eat her heart out, and he didn't have much success. What would the answer be? A quarrel maybe, so that to punish her he'd have gone off for the night to some hotel? Cassidy hadn't much faith in that, but it was the only thing he could think of; so that presently, picking up the phone, he put a call in to headquarters, where they could cover the city quicker than from here. James Francis Phelan, of Atwood, Nebraska — would they try the hotels on that and call back later to Cassidy's precinct? Then he hung up, made a note on the pad for his relief, and forgot all about it.

But five minutes later, at midnight when he came off duty, he found her standing on the corner outside the precinct house — looking as if she didn't know what to do or where to

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go. He became gruffly impatient with her but he drove her home.

And he waited outside in his car, too, while she went into the house. When she came out again her face seemed whiter than her dress. She only shook her head at Cassidy without a word.

He grunted shortly, sighed, and opened the car door.

"Get in now," he said more gently. "We'll have some coffee. It's what you need to buck you up."

Later, in the all-night lunchroom, he shot dark glances at her from under his shaggy brows. Was it a quarrel they'd had?

"No." She smiled painfully at him. "You see — we've been married just two days. And we — we never had a quarrel. He just said that he didn't want me to walk all the way to the car. So —"

It came out bit by bit then, how they'd gone to college together and how they'd been engaged ever since their graduation. But they couldn't marry, not for a while, not until he was making more money out in Atwood, Nebraska. And then he came East and stopped in Syracuse to see her — the first time they'd seen each other in eight months. All at once then the money hadn't seemed to matter; they knew they'd make out some way. So they were married very quietly, never intending to beforehand; and they'd been very happy, and if he was hurt now, if he was —

"There'll be none of that," Cassidy said uncomfortably. "Has he friends here? Is there anyone he might have decided to visit?"

"No. No one at all. That's why —" Her breath caught a little. When he had finished his coffee he drove her back to the rooming house. It was half-past twelve then, but the brown coupé still wasn't in the driveway. They sat there a while, waiting, Cassidy trying to be cheerful, before he thought of calling the precinct house.

There was a phone in the hall; she waited in the car while he used it. When Cassidy came out his heavy face looked darker than usual. They'd heard from headquarters, he said, that a James Francis Phelan of Atwood, Nebraska, had registered that night at the Pilgrim House. And what did she think of that?

He lost his anger as soon as he saw her face — he'd have staked his soul on the blind terror there.

"No," she whispered. "Why, he couldn't do that, Mr. Cassidy. We never had a word; we never —"

She stopped there; but Cassidy heard the breath she had to fight for. It was then that he decided to have a word with this Mr. James Phelan — a word in private, and undisturbed. He drove fast; at one o'clock precisely they got out of his car before the Pilgrim House.

But they had to wait a while there; no one answered the phone in Mr. Phelan's room. So Cassidy sat with her on a lounge facing the desk — five minutes, ten, fifteen. Every time a man came in he felt her head turn; every time a man passed he watched

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her hands clench white in her lap. Fifteen minutes of that was enough for Cassidy. Quite abruptly he got up and marched over to the desk. Mr. Phelan couldn't have come in another door?

"Mr. Phelan?" the clerk repeated. He looked past Cassidy's shoulders to the elevators. "Why — he just left a call for seven tomorrow. That man in the gray suit — getting in the elevator. Didn't you see him here?"

Cassidy had seen him well enough; he was sure the girl had too. Going back to her, his face was troubled.

"That fella," Cassidy asked her, "that fella in the gray suit that just went by. Did you see him?"

"Yes." She looked up at him — no recognition in her eyes. "He stopped at the desk there and — Why?"

Cassidy couldn't answer that why himself. James Francis Phelan — but not the James Francis Phelan his wife knew. His mind began to turn every which way thinking it over.

"Sit here now," he said at last. "I'll not be gone long. There's just something I've thought of to do."

He got the room number from the clerk, went up alone in the elevator, walked down a narrow deep-carpeted corridor, and rapped at a door. The young man in the gray suit opened it. Cassidy pushed by him, looked around, and turned by the bed.

"I want James Francis Phelan," he said.

Fid English, back from a drink in the grill and from the phone call he'd made out to Queens — everything copacetic, everything fine — made one mistake there; he thought the big man couldn't move fast. But before he had the gun clear of his pocket the big man was on him, twisting his wrist up savagely, with a strength Fid English couldn't match. His shot came a fraction too late — when the gun wasn't pointed to the big man but back on himself. The breast of his gray coat lost its grayness.

When Cassidy, with the gun, wrenched free of him, Fid English slid backward against the door, down that to the dark rug, kicked his left leg a little, and then stopped moving. Cassidy turned him over, but it wasn't any use; he was as dead then as one man could be, and there was nothing he was going to say about James Francis Phelan.

For what seemed a long time Cassidy knelt by him, his brows drawn down, his eyes shining darkly. Then there were voices and steps in the hall, and someone hammering on the door.

The someone was the house detective; a couple of plainclothesmen showed up soon after. They didn't have much to say when Cassidy finished his story. There was nothing in the dead man's clothing, or in the room, to make things any clearer.

One of them showed Cassidy some sheets of writing paper, for instance, that had been lying on the desk — sheets covered over, line after line, with the signature of James Francis Phelan. Toward the end it duplicated exactly the one on the driver's license

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they had taken from the dead man's pocket.

"This girl," the young plainclothesman said. "You think she's all right, Cassidy — up here?" He tapped his head. "If a man registers here as Phelan, with his car and his license and his name —"

Cassidy said a little sourly: "And then sits down and practices the signature he's written all his life — and then pulls a gun on me the minute I tell him what I'm here for —" He tapped his own head angrily. "The girl's all right there, me mastermind. Are you?"

"He ain't Phelan," the other plainclothesman said. "Not if the girl's right. Phelan never was in New York before — this guy's wearing a suit he bought here — three or four months ago by the looks of it. A hat too. See that?"

They saw it but it didn't give any of them any ideas. Thinking pretty somberly of the girl downstairs and of what they were going to say to her, Cassidy got a cigar out of his pocket and hunted for a match. The first ones he saw were in the fold-over packet that was lying on top of the heap of things they had taken out of Fid English's pocket. The moment he opened them he saw the writing inside the cover.

It was the only thing they had to try that wasn't either plain crazy or Nebraska. The telephone company, after a little fuss, matched it up with a name and an address; then they went downstairs and picked up the girl. Cassidy just told her that they might have some idea now where to find her husband. Even there she wasn't much help. She could only tell them that, so far as she knew, her husband had never known anybody named Frank A. Barber in his life.

It was getting on to two when they left the Pilgrim House; it was five minutes later that Frank Barber came in through his kitchen door, rubbed a hand across his mouth, and nodded a sick white face at Arnold.

"I put my car in the garage downstairs," he said. "Like you told me to, Arnold. He's — I heard him kicking around down there."

"Who's outside?" Arnold asked. "Anybody around?"

Frank Barber shook his head dumbly.

"Arnold," he said, "listen, Arnold. You aren't going to do anything crazy now. Why should you? We can let him go tomorrow, after we got the money. There's no sense —"

Arnold looked up at him. He said: "He seen your house downstairs — long enough to get everything in it set in his mind. And he seen me at the parking place. When the cops find out what happened, they'll know there was a leak somewhere. With Phelan around to help, they'd trail it back here inside a day. But no Phelan, no trace-back, Frank."

"Yes," Frank Barber said. "But —"

"We're gonna take him out now to a nice quiet place I know about, Frank. We're gonna stuff him so deep

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in a swamp there that he ain't gonna be found for a hundred million years. And you, Frank — you're gonna help us, pal. You're gonna drive the car. Because it's gonna be something to remember, understand — something to hold you up when that lily liver of yours starts jumping. Down the stairs, Frank; it's time to roll."

"No," Frank Barber said. "No. I never figured —"

Arnold knocked his head from right to left with a vicious slap.

"Down the stairs," he said.

Frank Barber started down them, stumbling, his eyes blurred with tears of pain and fright. In the basement room James Francis Phelan had been conscious for a long while, and now, as soon as the light clicked on, his eyes shone at them angrily over the gag, his mouth made mumbled protesting sounds under it. Arnold looked at the cords about his arms and legs, and tightened the gag; then he lifted his shoulders and Eddie grabbed his legs.

They threshed once or twice; Eddie snarled at him. Then, while Frank Barber held the garage door open, they carried him through, around the side of a cheap new sedan, and dumped him on the floor in back. Then the two of them got in.

"Push up that door," Arnold said. "If anybody's outside wait. We ain't in no rush. This guy'll keep."

Not a sound in the street; one lone car rounding the avenue corner. Frank Barber whispered something to himself; when Arnold snarled at him he scurried back, got in behind the wheel and closed the door. He started back fast up the incline, let the clutch out too soon, and stalled halfway up. When he swung around on the road at last, the car he had seen at the corner stopped beside him.

It was too dark up on the porches for Cassidy to make out the numbers, no matter how he squinted and bent sideways from the wheel.

"Where would 4221 be?" he asked the other driver, not really looking at him, peering over his hood toward an unreadable glitter of silvered numerals on the porch door. "Somewhere along here?"

The other man didn't answer him; Cassidy had a dim impression of a bony white face and horn-rimmed spectacles.

He repeated sharply, "4221. Where would I find that?"

Someone else, in the back of the other car, said: "Two blocks down, buddy. Straight ahead."

Cassidy grunted and eased into gear. There was some noise in the back seat of the other car — a brief not overloud scuffle. Cassidy didn't pay very much attention to it; somebody with a drink or two starting home.

Then, just after they started to move, he understood what the other voice had said: two blocks down. Two blocks down, when there'd been a light on 4204 back along the row? Fool drunks. Crazy as —

He heard the other voice again as he braked his car.

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"Get it in first! Get it out of here before they —"

Cassidy did instinctively the only thing he could have done. He swung his wheel over hard as the other car raced into life beside him. There was a crashing jar; fenders ripped and crumpled in a jagged sound. Then Cassidy's heavy car had the other pinned in to the curb and Cassidy was out with his gun in his hand and the two plainclothesmen were right behind him.

There wasn't much of a scuffle. A stocky man, fighting to get out of the sedan, cursed and grabbed for something in his pocket; the young plainclothesman, Cassidy's mastermind, floored him with what seemed a lazy blow of his gun barrel. The other man in back put up no argument. Cassidy himself lifted Frank Barber away from the wheel as if he'd been a child.

The girl was out then too, crying and speaking and laughing all at once, crouched down against the door in the back of Frank Barber's crumpled sedan. Cassidy heard, for the first time that night, and before ever he saw the face, a voice that could only be the voice of James Francis Phelan.

"Hello," it said. "Hello, honey. Was I a long time getting back?"

Long after three, in the little room that yesterday had been the only one they could afford, Mr. and Mrs. James Francis Phelan lay wakeful in the dark. He was full of ideas; his voice went on and on in a happy low rumble. They'd build a house, of course, whatever kind she wanted, with everything in it she asked for; they'd get a decent car; and they'd buy that cop a fine watch or something like that. Because now they could certainly do a lot of things on twenty-five thousand dollars cash.

"Yes," Mrs. James Francis Phelan answered to that. "Yes, Jimmy." But to her, of all that night, it was only the last hour that wasn't real — the bare room in the precinct house and the skinny man in the horn-rimmed spectacles wringing his hands and blubbering while the other two sat sullenly by. Mr. Cassidy had got the whole story from him — his job, the conversation he'd overheard that morning, the contest, and the prize that was waiting for James Francis Phelan of Atwood, Nebraska. But she couldn't believe it yet.

"Why," James Francis Phelan said, "I knew — I had a feeling all the time I was going to win that one, honey. I was as sure of it as I was of anything.

"Twenty-five thousand dollars," he went on huskily, "just for writing some words — for eating some soup. Why, honey — it's the easiest money we're ever going to make."

"Yes," she whispered. But she knew that with her it would always be the hardest. Suddenly the tears came, in a hot and anguished flood. He held her close, murmuring soft things, nothing sensible, while he smiled faintly over her head at the window. Crying like that, when everything was wonderful.

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CAVIAR TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC

With this issue, EQMM celebrates its Tenth Anniversary of publication. As we look back, it hardly seems possible that a full decade has passed since we feverishly, and with fear and trembling, put together the contents of Volume 1, Number 1; nor does it seem possible that we have purchased more than a thousand stories since that golden day when the first issue of EQMM, with its dignified front cover dated Fall 1941, appeared on newsstands all over the country. It seems no more than a year ago . . .

One thousand stories! The great tales of crime, detection, and mystery by nearly all the Old Masters; by nearly all the New Masters; and by nearly all the Masters-of-Tomorrow — many of them, if not most of them, published for the very first time in these pages. In ten years we have brought you the work of such outstanding detective-story writers as Edgar Allan Poe, Conan Doyle, Maurice Leblanc, Jacques Futrelle, R. Austin Freeman, Melville Davisson Post, G. K. Chesterton, H. C. Bailey, Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Georges Simenon, Margery Allingham, Anthony Berkeley, Craig Rice, Eric Ambler, Stuart Palmer, Philip MacDonald, Helen McCloy, Ngaio Marsh, Nicholas Blake, Hugh Pentecost, Q. Patrick, Anthony Boucher, Rex Stout, Roy Vickers, Charlotte Armstrong, John Dickson Carr, Cornell Woolrich — and what an injustice is imposed on us by the limitations of space! For there are so many others, all grand and glorious craftsmen and craftswomen, who deserve to be listed, who have won permanent seats at King Edgar's Round Table.

And sandwiched in between the work of the 'tec titans of yesterday and today, we gave you the tales of crime and detection written by those world-famous literary figures who are not usually associated in the public mind with the mystery story, and whose contributions to this field were for the most part unknown until their stories appeared in EQMM. Grand and glorious names, all — Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, O. Henry, W. Somerset Maugham, H. G. Wells, Sinclair Lewis, Edna St. Vincent Millay, John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner — and so many others soon to appear in EQMM, including Thomas Hardy, Robert Louis Stevenson, Oscar Wilde, Rudyard Kipling, John Galsworthy, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow . . .

It seemed only fitting, in view of EQMM's record of the past ten years, that we celebrate our Decennial Anniversary by offering you in this com-

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memorative issue not only the work of such acknowledged masters of the genre as Erle Stanley Gardner, Roy Vickers, and Viola Brothers Shore, but also an "unknown" story — a rare and wondrous discovery — by one of the most celebrated literary men of all time — a man, moreover, who has never before been published in these pages and who, we are positive, you never expected to meet even in EQMM.

We give you — George Bernard Shaw — and his strange tale of a "sane investigator and acute observer" with, surely, one of the strangest character-names ever to appear in print — Mr. Zeno Legge. And how shall we describe GBS's story? It is, in a minor way, a tale of detection; in an equally minor way, it is a tale of crime; but primarily it is a tale of revenge — fanatical, fantastic revenge. It is also a moody, gloomy tale — a tale of darkness and shadows and moonlight — a sombre, morbid tale — a tale of graves and ghouls and gruesome geography — a tale of madness, mystery, and miracles . . .

THE GRAVE OF BRIMSTONE BILLY

by GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

I ARRIVED IN DUBLIN ON THE EVENING of the 5th of August, and drove to the residence of my uncle, the Cardinal Archbishop. He is, like most of my family, deficient in feeling, and consequently averse to me personally. He lives in a dingy house, with a sidelong view of the portico of his cathedral from the front windows, and of a monster national school from the back. My uncle maintains no retinue. The people believe that he is waited upon by angels. When I knocked at the door, an old woman, his only servant, opened it, and informed me that her master was then officiating in the cathedral, and that he had directed her to prepare dinner for me in his absence. An unpleasant smell of salt fish made me ask her what the dinner consisted of. She assured me that she had cooked all that could be permitted in His Holiness' house on a Friday. On my asking her further why on a Friday, she replied that Friday was a fast day. I bade her tell His Holiness that I had hoped to have the pleasure of calling on him shortly, and drove to a hotel in Sackville Street, where I engaged apartments and dined.

After dinner I resumed my eternal search — I know not for what: it drives me to and fro like another Cain. I sought in the streets without success. I went to the theatre. The music was

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execrable, the scenery poor. I had seen the play a month before in London, with the same beautiful artist in the chief part. Two years had passed since, seeing her for the first time, I had hoped that she, perhaps, might be the long-sought mystery. It had proved otherwise. On this night I looked at her and listened to her for the sake of that bygone hope, and applauded her generously when the curtain fell. But I went out lonely still. When I had supped at a restaurant, I returned to my hotel, and tried to read. In vain. The sound of feet in the corridors as the other occupants of the hotel went to bed distracted my attention from my book. Suddenly it occurred to me that I had never quite understood my uncle's character. He, father to a great flock of poor and ignorant Irish; an austere and saintly man, to whom livers of hopeless lives daily appealed for help heavenward; who was reputed never to have sent away a troubled peasant without relieving him of his burden by sharing it; whose knees were worn less by the altar steps than by the tears and embraces of the guilty and wretched: he had refused to humor my light extravagances, or to find time to talk with me of books, flowers, and music. Had I not been mad to expect it? Now that I needed sympathy myself, I did him justice. I desired to be with a true-hearted man, and to mingle my tears with his.

I looked at my watch. It was nearly an hour past midnight. In the corridor the lights were out, except one jet at the end. I threw a cloak upon my shoulders, put on a Spanish hat, and left my apartment, listening to the echoes of my measured steps retreating through the deserted passages. A strange sight arrested me on the landing of the grand staircase. Through an open door I saw the moonlight shining through the windows of a saloon in which some entertainment had recently taken place. I looked at my watch again: It was but one o'clock; and yet the guests had departed. I entered the room, my boots ringing loudly on the waxed boards. On a chair lay a child's cloak and a broken toy. The entertainment had been a children's party. I stood for a time looking at the shadow of my cloaked figure upon the floor, and at the disordered decorations, ghostly in the white light. Then I saw that there was a grand piano, still open, in the middle of the room. My fingers throbbed as I sat down before it, and expressed all that I felt in a grand hymn which seemed to thrill the cold stillness of the shadows into a deep hum of approbation, and to people the radiance of the moon with angels. Soon there was a stir without too, as if the rapture were spreading abroad. I took up the chant triumphantly with my voice, and the empty saloon resounded as though to an orchestra.

"Hallo, sir!" "Confound you, sir —" "Do you suppose that this —"

I turned; and silence followed. Six men, partially dressed, and with disheveled hair, stood regarding me angrily. They all carried candles. One

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of them had a bootjack, which he held like a truncheon. Another, the foremost, had a pistol. The night porter was behind trembling.

"Sir," said the man with the revolver, coarsely, "may I ask whether you are mad, that you disturb people at this hour with such a noise?"

"Is it possible that you dislike it?" I replied, courteously.

"Dislike it!" said he, stamping with rage. "Do you suppose we enjoy it?"

"Take care: he's mad," whispered the man with the bootjack.

I began to laugh. Evidently they did think me mad. Unaccustomed to my habits, and ignorant of music as they probably were, the mistake, however absurd, was not unnatural. I rose. They came closer to one another; and the night porter ran away.

"Gentlemen," I said, "I am sorry for you. Had you lain still and listened, we should all have been the better and happier. But what you have done, you cannot undo. Kindly inform the night porter that I am gone to visit my uncle, the Cardinal Archbishop. Adieu!"

I strode past them, and left them whispering among themselves. Some minutes later I knocked at the door of the Cardinal's house. Presently a window on the first floor was opened; and the moonbeams fell on a gray head, with a black cap that seemed ashy pale against the unfathomable gloom of the shadow beneath the stone sill.

"Who are you?"

"I am Zeno Legge."

"What do you want at this hour?"

The question wounded me. "My dear uncle," I exclaimed, "I know you do not intend it, but you make me feel unwelcome. Come down and let me in, I beg."

"Go to your hotel," he said sternly. "I will see you in the morning. Good night." He closed the window.

I felt that if I let this rebuff pass, I should not feel kindly towards my uncle in the morning, nor, indeed, at any future time. I therefore plied the knocker with my right hand, and kept the bell ringing with my left until I heard the door-chain rattle within. The Cardinal's expression was grave as he confronted me on the threshold.

"Uncle," I cried, grasping his hand, "do not reproach me. Your door is never shut against the wretched. I am wretched. Let us sit up all night and talk."

"You may thank my position and not my charity for your admission, Zeno," he said. "For the sake of the neighbors, I had rather you played the fool in my study than upon my doorstep at this hour. Walk upstairs quietly, if you please. My housekeeper is a hard-working woman: the little sleep she allows herself must not be disturbed."

"You have a noble heart, uncle. I shall creep like a mouse."

"This is my study," he said, as we entered an ill-furnished den on the second floor. "The only refreshment I can offer you, if you desire any, is a bunch of raisins. The doctors have forbidden you to touch stimulants."

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"By heaven!" He raised his finger. "Pardon me: I was wrong to swear. But I had totally forgotten the doctors. At dinner I had a bottle of *Grave*."

"Humph! You have no business to be traveling alone. Your mother promised me that Bushy should come over here with you."

"Pshaw! Bushy is not a man of feeling. Besides, he is a coward. He refused to come with me because I purchased a revolver."

"He should have taken the revolver from you, and kept to his post."

"Why will you persist in treating me like a child, uncle? I am very impressionable, I grant you; but I have gone round the world alone, and do not need to be dry-nursed through a tour in Ireland."

"What do you intend to do here?"

I had no plans; and instead of answering I shrugged my shoulders and looked round the apartment. There was a statuette of the Virgin upon my uncle's desk. I looked at its face, as he was wont to look in the midst of his labors. I saw there eternal peace. The air became luminous with an infinite network of the Jeweled rings of Paradise descending in roseate clouds upon us.

"Uncle," I said, bursting into the sweetest tears I had ever shed, "my wanderings are over. I will enter the Church, if you will help me. Let us read together the third part of *Faust*, for I understand it at last."

"Hush, man," he said, half rising with an expression of alarm.

"Do not let my tears mislead you. I am calm and strong. Quick, let us have Goethe —".

"Come, come. Dry your eyes and be quiet. I have no library here."

"But I have — in my portmanteau at the hotel," I said, rising. "Let me go for it. I will return in fifteen minutes."

"The devil is in you, I believe. Cannot —"

I interrupted him with a shout of laughter. "Cardinal," I said noisily, "you have become profane; and a profane priest is always the best of good fellows. Let us have some wine; and I will sing you a beer song."

"Heaven forgive me if I do you wrong," he said; "but I believe God has laid the expiation of some sin on your unhappy head. Will you favor me with your attention for a while? I have something to say to you, and I have also to get some sleep before my hour for rising at half-past five."

"My usual hour for retiring — when I retire at all. But proceed. My fault is not inattention, but oversusceptibility."

"Well, then, I want you to go to Wicklow. My reasons —"

"No matter what they may be," said I, rising again. "It is enough that you desire me to go."

"Zeno! Will you sit down and listen to me?"

I sank upon my chair reluctantly. "Ardor is a crime in your eyes, even when it is shown in your service," I said. "May I turn down the light?"

"Why?"

"To bring on my sombre mood, in

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which I am able to listen with tireless patience."

"I will turn it down myself."

I thanked him, and composed myself to listen in the shadow. My eyes, I felt, glittered. I was like Poe's raven.

"Now for my reasons for sending you to Wicklow. First, for your own sake. If you stay in town, or in any place where excitement can be obtained by any means, you will be in Swift's Hospital in a week. You must live in the country, under the eye of one on whom I can depend. And you must have something to do to keep you out of mischief, and away from your music and painting and poetry, which, Sir John Richards writes to me, are dangerous for you in your present morbid state. Second, because I can entrust you with a task which, in the hands of a sensible man, might bring discredit on the Church. In short, I want you to investigate a miracle."

He looked attentively at me. I sat like a statue.

"You understand me?" he said.

"Nevermore," I replied, hoarsely. "Pardon me," I added, amused at the trick my imagination had played me, "I understand you perfectly."

"I hope you do. Well, four miles distant from the town of Wicklow is a village called Four Mile Water. The resident priest is Father Hickey. You have heard of the miracles at Knock?"

I winked.

"I did not ask you what you think of them, but whether you have heard of them. I see you have. I need not tell you that even a miracle may do more harm than good to the Church in this country, unless it can be proved so thoroughly that her powerful and jealous enemies are silenced by the testimony of followers of their heresy. Therefore, when I saw in a Wexford newspaper last week a description of a strange manifestation of the Divine Power which was said to have taken place at Four Mile Water, I was troubled in my mind about it. So I wrote to Father Hickey, bidding him give me an account of the matter if it were true, and, if not, to denounce from the altar the author of the report, and to contradict it in the paper at once. This is his reply. He says — well, the first part is about Church matters: I need not trouble you with it. He goes on to say —"

"One moment. Is that his own handwriting? It does not look like a man's."

"He suffers from rheumatism in the fingers of his right hand; and his niece, who is an orphan, and lives with him, acts as his amanuensis."

"Stay. What is her name?"

"Her name? Kate Hickey."

"How old is she?"

"Tush, man, she is only a little girl. If she were old enough to concern you, I should not send you into her way. Have you any more questions to ask about her?"

"None. I can fancy her in a white veil at the rite of confirmation, a type of faith and innocence. Enough of her. What says the Reverend Hickey of the apparitions?"

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"They are not apparitions. I will read you what he says. Ahem! 'In reply to your inquiries concerning the late miraculous event in this parish, I have to inform you that I can vouch for its truth, and that I can be confirmed not only by the inhabitants of the place, but by every person acquainted with the former situation of the graveyard referred to, including the Protestant Archdeacon of Baltinglas, who spends six weeks annually in the neighborhood. The newspaper account is incomplete and inaccurate. The following are the facts: About four years ago, a man named Wolfe Tone Fitzgerald settled in this village as a farrier. His antecedents did not become known, and he had no family. He lived by himself, was very careless of his person, and when in his cups, as he often was, regarded the honor neither of God nor man in his conversation. Indeed, if it were not speaking ill of the dead, one might say that he was a dirty, drunken, blasphemous blackguard. Worse again, he was, I fear, an atheist; for he never attended Mass, and gave His Holiness worse language even than he gave the Queen. I should have mentioned that he was a bitter rebel, and boasted that his grandfather had been out in '98, and his father with Smith O'Brien. In the end, he went by the name of Brimstone Billy, and was held up in the village as the type of all wickedness.

" 'You are aware that our graveyard, situated on the north side of the water, is famous throughout the country as the burial place of the nuns of St. Ursula, the hermit of Four Mile Water, and many other holy people. No Protestant has ever ventured to enforce his legal right of interment there, though two have died in the parish within my own recollection. Three weeks ago, this Fitzgerald died in a fit brought on by drink, and a great hullabaloo was raised in the village when it became known that he would be buried in the graveyard. The body had to be watched to prevent its being stolen and buried at the cross-roads. My people were greatly disappointed when they were told I could do nothing to stop the burial, particularly as I of course refused to read any service on the occasion. However, I bade them not interfere, and the interment was effected on the 14th of July, late in the evening, and long after the legal hour. There was no disturbance. Next morning, the *entire* graveyard was found moved to the south side of the water, with only one newly-filled grave left behind on the north side; and thus they both remain. The departed saints would not lie with the reprobate. I can testify to it on the oath of a Christian priest; and if this will not satisfy those outside the Church, everyone, as I said before, who remembers where the graveyard was two months ago, can confirm me.

" 'I respectfully suggest that a thorough investigation into the truth of this miracle be proposed to a committee of Protestant gentlemen. They shall not be asked to accept a single fact on hearsay from my people. The ordinance maps show where the grave-

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yard was, and anyone can see for himself where it is. I need not tell your Eminence what a rebuke this would be to those enemies of the Holy Church that have sought to put a stain on her by discrediting the late wonderful manifestations at Knock Chapel. If they come to Four Mile Water, they need cross-examine no one. They will be asked to believe nothing but their own senses.

" 'Awaiting your Eminence's counsel to guide me further in the matter, I am, etc.'

"Well, Zeno," said my uncle, "what do you think of Father Hickey now?"

"Uncle, do not ask me. Beneath this roof I desire to believe everything. The Reverend Hickey has appealed strongly to my love of legend. Let us admire the poetry of his narrative, and ignore the balance of probability between a tale told by a Christian priest and a whole graveyard swimming across a river in the middle of the night and forgetting to return."

"Tom Hickey is telling no lie, sir. But he may be mistaken."

"Such a mistake amounts to insanity. It is true that I myself, awaking suddenly in the depth of night, have found myself convinced that the position of my bed had been reversed. But on opening my eyes the illusion ceased. I fear Mr. Hickey is mad. Your best course is this: send down to Four Mile Water a perfectly sane investigator; an acute observer; one whose perceptive faculties, at once healthy and subtle, are absolutely unclouded by religious prejudice. In a word, send me. I will report to you the true state of affairs in a few days, and you can then make arrangements for transferring Hickey to the asylum."

"Yes, I had intended to send you. You are wonderfully sharp; and you would make a capital detective if you could only keep your mind to one point. But your chief qualification for this business is that you are too crazy to excite the suspicion of those whom you may have to watch. For the affair may be a trick. If so, I hope and believe that Hickey has no hand in it. Still, it is my duty to take every precaution."

"Cardinal, may I ask whether traces of insanity have ever appeared in our family?"

"Except in you and in my grandmother, no; and you resemble her personally. Why do you ask?"

"Because it has often occurred to me that you are, perhaps, a little cracked. Excuse my candor; but a man who has devoted his life to the pursuit of a red hat; who accuses everyone else besides himself of being mad; and who is disposed to listen seriously to a tale of a peripatetic graveyard, can hardly be quite sane. Depend upon it, uncle, you want rest and change. The blood of your grandmother is in your veins."

"I hope I may not be committing a sin in sending a ribald on the Church's affairs," he replied, fervently. "However, we must use the instruments put into our hands. Is it agreed that you go?"

"Had you not delayed me with this

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story, which I might as well have learned on the spot, I should have been there already."

"There is no occasion for impatience, Zeno. I must first send to Hickey to find a place for you. I shall tell him that you are going to recover your health, as, in fact, you are. And, Zeno, in Heaven's name be discreet. Try to act like a man of sense. Do not dispute with Hickey on matters of religion. Since you are my nephew, you had better not disgrace me."

"I shall do you infinite credit."

"I wish you would, although you would hardly be an acquisition to the Church. And now I must turn you out. It is nearly three o'clock, and I need some sleep. Do you know your way back to your hotel?"

"I need not stir. I can sleep in this chair. Go to bed, and never mind me."

"I shall not close my eyes until you are safely out of the house. Come, rouse yourself, and say good night."

The following is a copy of my first report to the Cardinal:

My dear Uncle,

The miracle is genuine. I have affected perfect credulity in order to throw the Hickeys and the countryfolk off their guard with me. I have listened to their method of convincing sceptical strangers. I have examined the ordinance maps, and cross-examined the neighboring Protestant gentlefolk. I have spent a day upon the ground on each side of the water, and have visited it at midnight. I have considered the upheaval theories, subsidence theories, volcanic theories, and tidal wave theories which the provincial *savants* have suggested. They are all untenable. There is only one scoffer in the district, an Orangeman; and he admits the removal of the cemetery, but says it was dug up and transplanted in the night by a body of men under the command of Father Tom. This also is out of the question. The interment of Brimstone Billy was the first which had taken place in four years, and his is the only grave which bears a trace of recent digging. It is alone on the north bank, and the inhabitants shun it after nightfall. As each passerby during the day throws a stone upon it, it will soon be marked by a large cairn. The original graveyard, with a ruined stone chapel still standing in its midst, is now all on the south side — except the single grave of Brimstone Billy. You may send down a committee to investigate the matter as soon as you please. There can be no doubt as to the miracle having actually taken place, as recorded by Hickey. As for me, I have grown so accustomed to it that if the county Wicklow were to waltz off with me to Middlesex, I should be quite impatient of any expressions of surprise from my friends in London.

Is not the above a business-like statement? Away, then, with this stale miracle. If you would see for yourself a miracle which can never pall, a vision of youth and health to be crowned with garlands forever, come down and see Kate Hickey, whom you suppose to be a little girl. Illusion, my

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lord cardinal, illusion! She is seventeen, with a bloom and a brogue that would lay your asceticism in ashes at a flash. To her I am an object of wonder, a strange man bred in wicked cities. She is courted by six feet of farming material, chopped off a spare length of coarse humanity by the Almighty, and flung into Wicklow to plow the fields. His name is Phil Langan; and he hates me. I have to consort with him for the sake of Father Tom, whom I entertain vastly by stories of your wild oats sown at Salamanca. I exhausted all my authentic anecdotes the first day, and now I invent gallant escapades with Spanish donnas, in which you figure as a youth of unstable morals. This delights Father Tom infinitely. I feel that I have done you a service by thus casting on the cold sacerdotal abstraction which formerly represented you in Katie's imagination a ray of vivifying passion.

What a country this is! A Hesperidean garden: such skies! Adieu uncle, adieu.

Zeno Legge

Behold me, then, at Four Mile Water, in love. I have been in love frequently, but not oftener than once a year had I encountered a woman who affected me as seriously as Katie Hickey. She was so shrewd, and yet so flippant! When I spoke of art she yawned. When I deplored the sordidness of the world she laughed and called me "poor fellow!" When I told her what a treasure of beauty and freshness she had she ridiculed me. When I reproached her with her brutality she became angry, and sneered at me for being what she called a fine gentleman. One sunny afternoon we were standing at the gate of her uncle's house, she looking down the dusty road for the detestable Langan, when she said:

"How soon are you going back to London?"

"I am not going back to London, Miss Hickey. I am not yet tired of Four Mile Water."

"I'm sure Four Mile Water ought to be proud of your approbation."

"You disapprove of my liking it, then? Or is it that you grudge me the happiness I have found here? I think Irish ladies grudge a man a moment's peace."

"I wonder you have ever prevailed on yourself to associate with Irish ladies, since they are so far beneath you."

"Did I say they were beneath me, Miss Hickey? I feel that I have made a deep impression on you."

"Indeed! Yes, you're quite right. I assure you I can't sleep at night for thinkin' of you, Mr. Legge. It's the best a Christian can do, seein' you think so mighty little of yourself."

"You are triply wrong, Miss Hickey: wrong to be sarcastic with me, wrong to pretend that there is anything unreasonable in my belief that you think of me sometimes, and wrong to discourage the candor with which I always avow that I think constantly of myself."

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"Then you had better not speak to me, since you say I have no manners."

"Again! Did I say you had no manners? The warmest expressions of regard from my mouth seem to reach your ears transformed into insults. Were I to repeat the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, you would retort as though I had been reproaching you. This is because you hate me. You never misunderstand Langan, whom you love."

"I don't know what London manners are, Mr. Legge, but in Ireland gentlemen are expected to mind their own business. How dare you say I love Mr. Langan?"

"Then you do not love him?"

"It is nothing to you whether I love him or not."

"Nothing to me that you hate me and love another?"

"I didn't say I hated you. You're not so very clever yourself at understandin' what people say, though you make such a fuss because they don't understand you." Here, as she glanced down the road again, she suddenly looked glad.

"Aha!" I said.

"What do you mean by 'Aha!'"

"No matter. I will now show you what a man's sympathy is. As you perceived just then, Langan — who is too tall for his age, by the way — is coming to pay you a visit. Well, instead of staying with you, as a jealous woman would, I will withdraw."

"I don't care whether you go or stay, I'm sure. I wonder what you would give to be as fine a man as Mr. Langan."

"All I possess: I swear it! But solely because you admire tall men more than broad views. Mr. Langan may be defined geometrically as length without breadth; altitude without position; a line on the landscape, not a point in it."

"How very clever you are!"

"You do not understand me, I see. Here comes your lover, stepping over the wall like a camel. And here go I, out through the gate like a Christian. Good afternoon, Mr. Langan. I am going because Miss Hickey has something to say to you about me which she would rather not say in my presence. You will excuse me?"

"Oh, I'll excuse you," said he boorishly. I smiled, and went out. Before I was quite out of hearing, Kate whispered vehemently to him, "I *hate* that fellow."

I smiled again, but I had scarcely done so when my spirits fell. I walked hastily away with a coarse threatening sound in my ears like that of the clarinets whose sustained low notes darken the woodland in *Der Freischütz*. I found myself presently at the graveyard, now on the south side of the water. It was a barren place, enclosed by a mud wall with a gate to admit funerals, and numerous gaps to admit the peasantry, who made short cuts across it as they went to and fro between Four Mile Water and the market town. The graves were mounds overgrown with grass: there was no keeper; nor were there flowers,

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railings, or any of the conventionalities that make an English graveyard repulsive. A great thornbush, near what was called the Grave of the Holy Sisters, was covered with scraps of cloth and flannel, attached by peasant women who had prayed before it. There were three kneeling there as I entered, for the reputation of the place had been revived of late by the miracle; and a ferry had been established close by, to conduct visitors over the route taken by the graveyard. From where I stood I could see on the opposite bank the heap of stones, perceptibly increased since my last visit, marking the deserted grave of Brimstone Billy. I strained my eyes broodingly at it for some minutes, and then descended the river bank and entered the boat.

"Good evenin' t'your honor," said the ferryman, and set to work to draw the boat hand over hand by a rope stretched across the water.

"Good evening. Is your business beginning to fall off yet?"

"Faith, it never was as good as it mightabeen. The people that comes from the south side can see Billy's grave — Lord have mercy on him! — across the wather; and they think bad of payin' a penny to put a stone over him. It's them that lives towrst Dublin that makes the journey. Your honor is the third I've brought from south to north this blessed day."

"When do most people come? In the afternoon, I suppose?"

"All hours, sur, except afther dusk. There isn't a sowl in the counthry ud come within sight of that grave wanst the sun goes down."

"And you, do you stay here all night by yourself?"

"The holy heavens forbid! Is it me stay here all night? No, your honor: I tether the boat at siven o'clyock, and lave Brimstone Billy — God forgimme! — to take care of it t'll mornin'."

"It will be stolen some night, I'm afraid."

"Arra, who'd dare come next or near it, let alone stale it? Faith, I'd think twice before lookin' at it meself in the dark. God bless your honor, and gran'che long life."

I had given him sixpence. I went to the reprobate's grave and stood at the foot of it, looking at the sky, gorgeous with the descent of the sun. To my English eyes, accustomed to giant trees, broad lawns, and stately mansions, the landscape was wild and inhospitable. The ferryman was already tugging at the rope on his way back (I had told him I did not intend to return that way), and presently I saw him make the painter fast to the south bank, put on his coat, and trudge homeward. I turned towards the grave at my feet. Those who had interred Brimstone Billy, working hastily at an unlawful hour and in fear of molestation by the people, had hardly dug a grave. They had scooped out earth enough to hide their burden, and no more. A stray goat had kicked away a corner of the mound and exposed the coffin. It occurred to me, as I took some of the stones from the

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cairn and heaped them so as to repair the breach, that had the miracle been the work of a body of men, they would have moved the one grave instead of the many. Even from a supernatural point of view, it seemed strange that the sinner should have banished the elect, when, by their superior numbers, they might so much more easily have banished him.

It was almost dark when I left the spot. After a walk of half a mile, I recrossed the water by a bridge, and returned to the farmhouse in which I lodged. Here, finding that I had had enough of solitude, I only stayed to take a cup of tea. Then I went to Father Hickey's cottage.

Kate was alone when I entered. She looked up quickly as I opened the door, and turned away disappointed when she recognized me.

"Be generous for once," I said. "I have walked about aimlessly for hours in order to avoid spoiling the beautiful afternoon for you by my presence. When the sun was up I withdrew my shadow from your path. Now that darkness has fallen, shed some light on mine. May I stay half an hour?"

"You may stay as long as you like, of course. My uncle will soon be home. He is clever enough to talk to you."

"What! More sarcasms! Come, Miss Hickey, help me to spend a pleasant evening. It will only cost you a smile. I am somewhat cast down. Four Mile Water is a paradise, but without you it would be a little lonely."

"It must be very lonely for you. I wonder why you came here."

"Because I heard that the women here were all Zerlinas, like you, and the men Masettos, like Mr. Phil — where are you going to?"

"Let me pass, Mr. Legge. I had intended never speaking to you again after the way you went on about Mr. Langan today; and I wouldn't either, only my uncle made me promise not to take any notice of you, because you were — no matter. But I won't listen to you any more on the subject."

"Do not go. I swear never to mention his name again. I beg your pardon for what I said: you shall have no further cause for complaint."

She sat down, evidently disappointed by my submission. I took a chair, and placed myself near her. She tapped the floor impatiently with her foot. I saw that there was not a movement I could make, not a look, which did not irritate her.

"You were remarking," I said, "that your uncle desired you to take no notice of me because —"

She did not answer.

"I fear I have offended you again by my curiosity. But, indeed, I had no idea that he had forbidden you to tell me the reason."

"He did not forbid me. Since you are so determined to find out —"

"No, excuse me. I do not wish to know, I am sorry I asked."

"Indeed! Perhaps you would be sorrier still to be told. I only made a secret of it out of consideration for you."

"Then your uncle has spoken ill of me behind my back. If that be so,

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there is no such thing as a true man in Ireland. I would not have believed it on the word of any woman alive save yourself."

"I never said my uncle was a backbiter. Just to show you what he thinks of you, I will tell you, whether you want to know it or not, that he bid me not mind you because you were only a poor mad creature, sent down here to be out of harm's way."

"Oh, Miss Hickey!"

"There now, you have got it out of me! — and I wish I had bit my tongue out first. I sometimes think that you have a bad angel in you."

"I am glad you told me this," I said gently. "Do not reproach yourself for having done so, I beg. Your uncle has been misled by what he has heard of my family, who are all more or less insane. Far from being mad, I am actually the only rational man named Legge in the three kingdoms. I will prove this to you, and at the same time keep your indiscretion in countenance by telling you something I ought not to tell you. It is this. I am not here as an invalid or a chance tourist. The Cardinal, a shrewd if somewhat erratic man, selected mine from all the long heads at his disposal to come down here and find out the truth of Father Hickey's story. Would he have entrusted such a task to a madman, think you?"

"The truth of — who dared to doubt my uncle's word? And so you are a spy, a dirty informer!"

I started. The adjective she had used, though probably the commonest expression of contempt in Ireland, is revolting to an Englishman.

"Miss Hickey," I said, "there is in me, as you have said, a bad angel. Do not shock my good angel — who is a person of taste — quite away from my heart, lest the other be left undisputed monarch of it. Hark! The chapel bell is ringing the angelus. Can you, with that sound softening the darkness of the village night, cherish a feeling of spite against one who admires you?"

"You come between me and my prayers," she said hysterically, and began to sob. She had scarcely done so when I heard voices without. Then Langan and the priest entered.

"Oh, Phil," she cried running to him, "take me away from him! I can't bear —" I turned towards him, and showed him my dog-tooth in a false smile. He felled me at one stroke.

"Murder!" exclaimed the priest.

"He's an informer," sobbed Kate. "He came down here to spy on you, uncle, and to try and show that the blessed miracle was a make-up. I knew it long before he told me, by his insulting ways. He wanted to make love to me."

I rose with difficulty from beneath the table, where I had lain motionless for a moment.

"Sir," I said, "I am somewhat dazed by the recent action of Mr. Langan, whom I beg, the next time he converts himself into a fulling-mill to do so at the expense of a man more nearly his equal in strength than I. What your niece has told you is partly

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true. I am indeed the Cardinal's spy, and I have already reported to him that the miracle is a genuine one. A committee of gentlemen will wait on you tomorrow to verify it, at my suggestion. I have thought that the proof might be regarded by them as more complete if you were taken by surprise. Miss Hickey: that I admire all that is admirable in you is but to say that I have a sense of the beautiful. To say that I love you would be mere profanity. Mr. Langan: I have in my pocket a loaded pistol, which I carry from a silly English prejudice against your countrymen. Had I been the Hercules of the plowtail and you in my place, I should have been a dead man now. Do not redden: you are safe as far as I am concerned."

"Let me tell you before you leave my house for good," said Father Hickey, who seemed to have become unreasonably angry, "that you should never have crossed my threshold if I had known you were a spy — no, not if your uncle were the Pope himself."

Here a frightful thing happened to me. I felt giddy, and put my hand to my head. Three warm drops trickled over it. Instantly I became murderous. My mouth filled with blood; my eyes were blinded with it; I seemed to drown in it. My hand went involuntarily to the pistol. It is my habit to obey my impulses instantaneously. Fortunately, the impulse to kill vanished before a sudden perception of how I might miraculously humble the mad vanity in which these foolish people had turned upon me.

"And let *me* tell you," Langan was saying, "that if you think yourself handier with cold lead than you are with your fists, I'll exchange shots with you, and welcome, whenever you please. Father Tom's credit is the same to me as my own; and if you say a word against it, you lie."

"His credit is in my hands," I said. "I am the Cardinal's witness."

"There is the door," said the priest, holding it open before me. "Until you can undo the visible work of God's hand your testimony can do no harm to me."

I bowed to Kate and walked out. It was so dark that I could not at first see the garden gate. Before I found it, I heard through the window Father Hickey's voice saying, "I wouldn't for ten pounds that this had happened, Phil. He's as mad as a march hare. The Cardinal told me so."

I returned to my lodging and took a cold bath to cleanse the blood from my neck and shoulder. The effect of the blow I had received was so severe that even after the bath and a light meal I felt giddy and languid. There was an alarm clock on the mantelpiece: I wound it, set the alarm for half-past twelve, muffled it so that it should not disturb the people in the adjoining room, and went to bed, where I slept soundly for an hour and a quarter. Then the alarm roused me, and I sprang up before I was thoroughly awake. Had I hesitated, the desire to relapse into perfect sleep would have overpowered me. Although the muscles of my neck were

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painfully stiff, and my hands unsteady from my nervous disturbance, produced by the interruption of my first slumber, I dressed myself resolutely, and, after taking a draught of cold water, stole out of the house. It was exceedingly dark; and I had some difficulty in finding the cowhouse, whence I borrowed a spade, and a truck with wheels, ordinarily used for moving sacks of potatoes. These I carried in my hands until I was beyond earshot of the house, where I put the spade on the truck and wheeled it along the road to the cemetery. When I approached the water, knowing that no one would dare to come thereabout at such an hour, I made greater haste, no longer concerning myself about the rattling of the wheels. Looking across to the opposite bank, I could see a phosphorescent glow, marking the lonely grave of Brimstone Billy. This helped me to find the ferry station, where, after wandering a little and stumbling often, I found the boat, and embarked with my implements. Guided by the rope, I crossed the water without difficulty, landed, made fast the boat, dragged the truck up the bank, and sat down to rest on Billy's grave.

For nearly a quarter of an hour I sat watching the patches of jack-o'-lantern fire, and collecting my strength for the work before me. Then the distant bell of the chapel clock tolled one. I rose, took the spade, and in about ten minutes uncovered the coffin, which smelt horribly. Keeping to hindward of it, and using the spade as a lever, I contrived with great labor to place it on the truck. I wheeled it without accident to the landing place, where, by placing the shafts of the truck upon the stern of the boat and lifting the foot by main strength, I succeeded in embarking my load after twenty minutes' toil, during which I got covered with clay and perspiration, and several times all but upset the boat. At the southern bank I had less difficulty in getting truck and coffin ashore, and dragging them up to the graveyard.

It was now past two o'clock, and the dawn had begun — so that I had no further trouble from want of light. I wheeled the coffin to a patch of loamy soil which I had noticed in the afternoon near the Grave of the Holy Sisters. I had warmed to my work; my neck no longer pained me; and I began to dig vigorously, soon making a shallow trench, deep enough to hide the coffin with the addition of a mound. The chill pearl-colored morning had by this time quite dissipated the darkness. I could see, and was myself visible, for miles around. This alarmed me, and made me impatient to finish my task. Nevertheless, I was forced to rest for a moment before placing the coffin in the trench. I wiped my brow and wrists and again looked about me. The tomb of the holy women, a massive slab supported on four stone spheres, was gray and wet with dew. Near it was the thornbush covered with rags, the newest of which were growing gaudy in the radiance which was stretching up

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from the coast on the east. It was time to finish my work. I seized the truck, laid it alongside the grave, and gradually prized the coffin off with the spade until it rolled over into the trench with a hollow sound like a drunken remonstrance from the sleeper within. I shoveled the earth round and over it, working as fast as possible. In less than a quarter of an hour it was buried. Ten minutes more sufficed to make the mound symmetrical, and to clear the traces of my work from the adjacent sward. Then I flung down the spade and sighed with relief.

But I recoiled as I saw that I was standing on a barren common, covered with furze. No product of man's handiwork was near me except my truck and spade and the grave of Brimstone Billy, now as lonely as before. I turned toward the water. *On the opposite bank was the cemetery* — with the tomb of the holy women, the thornbush with its rags stirring in the morning breeze, and the broken mud wall. The ruined chapel was there too, not a stone shaken from its crumbling walls, not a sign to show that it and its precinct were less rooted in their place than the eternal hills around!

I looked down at the grave with a pang of compassion for the unfortunate Wolf Tone Fitzgerald, with whom the blessed would not rest. I was even astonished, though I had worked expressly to this end. But the birds were astir, and the cocks crowing. My landlord was an early riser. I put the spade on the truck again and hastened back to the farm, where I replaced them in the cowhouse. Then I stole into the house, and took a clean pair of boots, an overcoat, and a silk hat. These, with a change of linen, were sufficient to make my appearance respectable. I went out again, bathed in the Four Mile Water, took a last look at the cemetery back in its original site, and walked to Wicklow, whence I traveled by the first train to Dublin.

Some months later, at Cairo, I received a packet of Irish newspapers, and a leading article, cut from *The Times*, on the subject of the miracle. Father Hickey had suffered the meed of his inhospitable conduct. The committee, arriving at Four Mile Water the day after I left, had found the graveyard exactly where it had formerly stood. Father Hickey, taken by surprise, had attempted to defend himself by a confused statement, which led the committee to declare finally that the miracle was a gross imposture. *The Times*, commenting on this after adducing a number of examples of priestly craft, remarked, "We are glad to learn that the Rev. Mr. Hickey has been permanently relieved of his duties as the parish priest of Four Mile Water by his ecclesiastical superior. It is less gratifying to have to record that it has been found possible to obtain two hundred signatures to a memorial embodying the absurd defense offered to the committee, and expressing unabated confidence in the integrity of Mr. Hickey."

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SPECIAL AWARD FOR THE DETECTIVE-STORY WRITERS' DETECTIVE STORY: ROBERT ARTHUR

The full title of Robert Arthur's prize-winning story — "The 51st Sealed Room; or, The MWA Murder" — tells you what to expect: first, a locked-room story in the titillating and tantalizing tradition of Edgar-Allan-Poe — Thomas-Bailey-Aldrich — Joseph-Sheridan-Le-Fanu — Israel-Zangwill — John-Dickson-Carr — Clayton-Rawson; second, a story about that world-famous organization of literary crimeteers, Mystery Writers of America, Inc. Yes, in this story you will meet many celebrated American mystery writers — in person, on stage, and in the surprising and unexpected role of secondary characters. But don't let the wording of the special award or the presence of the real-life detective-story writers fool you: Robert Arthur's sleuthian spoof might be considered a sort of "family joke," which always seems to be infinitely more amusing to insiders than it is to outsiders; in this instance, however, there are no outsiders — all you readers, all you mystery fans all over these United States, are insiders — you are all "members of the family." And what a far-flung, fabulous family it is!

Further comments when you have finished the story . . .

THE 51st SEALED ROOM; *or, The MWA Murder*

by ROBERT ARTHUR

"A COMPLETELY new way to escape from a locked room!" Gordon Waggoner's eyes glowed and he ran an almost translucent hand through hair as silvery as dandelion seed. "Though technically I suppose I should call it a 'sealed room.' The idea only came to me last Friday, the first, and I already have the plot worked out in detail. Think of it, my fifty-first locked-room mystery — and no two alike!"

"Congratulations!" Harrison Mannix said, concealing a stab of envy. "That calls for another drink. Oh, François!"

The small bar of the Fontainebleau, on 52nd Street, was snug against an

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early September fog that prowled New York like a damp gray alley cat. François, flushed from hurrying drinks to the big, barren room upstairs where a monthly meeting of the Mystery Writers of America was being held, brought a rum-and-cola for Waggoner, Rhine wine and soda for Mannix. The blond, middle-aging writer never touched anything stronger than wine — he prided himself on keeping his head clear even when relaxing. You never knew when a plot idea would pop into your mind, and mystery writing being the highly competitive business it is these days, a man couldn't afford to forget the smallest notion that might be incorporated into a book. At least Mannix, who was finding new ideas harder to come by, couldn't.

They touched glasses. "Skoal!" Mannix said. Then, with just the proper touch of disinterest, "How did you hit on it?"

"You know how these things are," Gordon Waggoner answered. "They come when you least expect it. This one, as it happens, came out of a chance conversation."

He was about to say more when two members from the group upstairs came down, hunting for François, who was muttering to himself as he tried to mix a dozen drinks at once. His black eye-patch giving him the appearance of a genial pirate, Brett Halliday paused, plucked a brandy from the almost-ready tray, and Clayton Rawson, an angular Merlin, reached for a whiskey that vanished in midair before he could get it to his lips. With solemn indignation he demanded and got another, and paid for it with a bill that exploded in bright flame as François took it. The small, stout Frenchman sighed as the two returned upstairs, made a note on a pad, and went on mixing drinks.

Waggoner remained silent after Halliday and Rawson had gone, and Mannix, by way of jogging him, remarked, "I hope you're not going to use a detachable window-frame that looks solid, because John Dickson Carr has already used that."

"Carr!" the little man snorted. "Carr is good, very good, but you don't think I'd repeat anything he's used, do you? Oh, no, when Carr and Queen and the others upstairs read it, they'll wonder why they didn't think of it themselves."

Momentary anxiety clouded Waggoner's puckish features.

"At least, I don't *think* it's been used. But you never can be sure. Especially with Carr. He's written so many stories that even he's forgotten —

"No, I'm sure it's new. I'll have it finished by the end of the month."

"I wish I could plot as easily as you," Mannix said warmly. Flattery was the one thing the shy, introspective little Waggoner responded to. The year round he lived by himself in his rented stone cottage in Connecticut, writing an incredible amount of fiction and carrying on a voluminous and usually acrid correspondence

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with other mystery writers. These monthly visits to the meetings of the New York chapter of the MWA — Mystery Writers of America — were his only social outings. Usually he simply sat and said nothing, even to colleagues to whom he might have written a five-page letter only the day before. It was sheer luck that he wasn't interested in the lecture on ballistics to which the rest of the MWA membership was listening in the room above, thus giving Mannix a chance to chat with him. Even though they lived only two miles apart, in western Connecticut, Waggoner did not encourage the younger man to drop in.

"Everybody knows you're the best plotter in the business," Mannix added — thinking, *If I can get him to tell me the gimmick, then steer him off by telling him it was used years ago* — "I'll certainly be looking forward to reading it."

"I think you'll enjoy it." Waggoner rose to the lure. "I'm going to make my central character a mystery writer — a complete scoundrel who becomes the victim." He cleared his throat. "Ah — I hope you won't mind if he seems a little like you, Harry. Just superficially, of course."

"Why should I?" Mannix asked heartily. "An English setting, I suppose?"

"Oh, no — America. Rural Connecticut, in fact. Country very much like the region where I live."

"I see. An old revolutionary house, then? Big chimney flues — wide floor boards — loose siding on the house — plenty of ways to get out of a locked room."

"Nothing of the sort!" Waggoner crowed. "The murder will take place in a modern cottage. A fireplace, yes, but with a flue so small only a cat could get out. Two doors, both nailed shut by heavy boards across the inside. Three windows similarly barred, the boards being no more than four inches apart. The roof tightly constructed with solid sheathing, insulating paper, and shingles, not one of which is out of place. The floor solid concrete, covered by linoleum. The walls solid stone. No concealed entrances, no Judas windows, no doors sealed shut by gummed paper drawn against the inside cracks by strong suction. How would you get out of a room like that, eh?" he demanded.

"I don't know," Mannix answered. "Are you sure it can be done?"

"Perfectly sure." Waggoner smiled slightly and rose, reaching for his hat, a shapeless black felt. "I have to hurry if I'm going to make my train. I'll start writing it in the morning. . . . You're not coming back to Connecticut tonight?"

"No," Mannix told him. "Matter of fact, I'm flying to Hollywood tomorrow. An eight weeks' contract with Twentieth Century Fox to do a screen treatment. Henry Klinger arranged it."

"Congratulations," Waggoner said. "See you when you get back."

He scuttled for the door, strands of silvery fluff flying where they escaped

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beneath his hatband. Mannix ordered another Rhine wine and soda and moodily carried it upstairs, where he found a vacant chair at the rear of the crowd. Someone from the New York police department was lecturing on ballistics, with slides, and Mannix regretted he had left the bar.

Many members were making notes, but he saw that Percival Wilde had his eyes closed, while John Dickson Carr was squirming in his seat, as if waiting for an opportunity to contradict the speaker. Rex Stout sat in a rear row, stroking his beard, his expression somehow suggesting benevolent tolerance — the tolerance of a man who has already appeared in print with some of the very material the note-takers around him were so busily recording. Little Helen Reilly, who probably had forgotten more about police procedure than most of the writers present would ever know, gazed longingly into an empty glass and eavesdropped on the whispered conversation which Larry Blochman was carrying on in French with one of the newer MWA members, Georges Simenon, who had transformed himself into a Connecticut squire, thanks to the enviable international success of his Inspector Maigret.

Mannix, eavesdropping himself, found that they were discussing French royalty rates, and ceased to listen. It was true that the official motto of the organization was *Crime Does Not Pay — Enough*, but he sometimes felt that the discussions of royalty rates and contracts which ensued whenever two or more mystery writers met were overdone. This feeling had been growing on him more particularly of late, as his own earnings dwindled.

Abandoning any pretense of giving attention to the speaker of the evening, he slumped in his chair and sipped his drink. He did not bother with such minutiæ of mystery writing as ballistics, or even fingerprints. Primarily, he wrote tales of chase and violence, based upon a recipe of rapid action which made clues and explanations not only unnecessary but frequently impossible.

However, he had had a considerable success with a couple of locked-room plots some years before, and as he waited for the meeting to be over he moodily pondered his failure to get Gordon Waggoner to confide in him. He owed his publisher a book, and perhaps, with a little changing around —

He was still brooding when the speaker finally finished and the meeting broke up. The suburbanites hurried homeward. Most of the remainder transferred themselves to a nearby hotel suite where Brett Halliday and Helen McCloy, a husband and wife team who were not collaborators but individually turned out completely different types of mysteries, presided over an auxiliary party that usually lasted until dawn. By the time it broke up, Mannix had forgotten his conversation with Gordon Waggoner.

Some weeks later, in Hollywood, it was violently recalled to him by headlines shouting Waggoner's death.

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The writer's body had been found in his Connecticut cottage, seated at his desk, one hand resting on the keys of his typewriter, the other apparently in the very act of moving the spacer arm.

The body had no head.

Gordon Waggoner's head, silvery hair carefully combed, had been found perched on a large beer stein, on top of the bookcase which held a complete set of first editions of his own books.

The room itself had been tightly sealed by having both doors and all three windows nailed shut on the inside by heavy boards.

The world's foremost writer of locked-room mysteries had been rather gaudily murdered — in a locked room.

Mannix pushed his car recklessly along the country road which was the shortest route to Waggoner's cottage. It was silly to be in such a hurry. After all, Waggoner had been killed five weeks before — Mannix had had to finish his Hollywood job before returning East — and the macabre mystery of the writer's death was still unsolved. But now that he was back, Mannix's impatience overcame his logic.

For he knew one fact of which the police were obviously ignorant — the murderer had plainly used Waggoner's own device in sealing the cottage and making good his escape. With that advantage, Mannix felt sure he could find a clue that would unlock the secret for him. And his publisher was pressing him unpleasantly for a new book. If he could puzzle out the escape method, base a mystery on it, and rush it to the publisher, he could cash in on the endless reams of publicity which Waggoner's death had produced.

In his pockets were the notes he had made from the many lurid stories in the papers. Also, and probably more valuable, was a concise report on the murder which he had received from Ed Radin, a fellow MWA member and one of the country's foremost crime reporters.

Discovery of the murder (Ed had written) was made by rural mail-carrier Jody Pine, who notified owner of the cottage, local farmer named Briscoe. He phoned State Police. Through cracks between boards that covered windows from the inside, police were able to see Waggoner's body. They broke in with axes to find Waggoner's headless corpse seated before his typewriter. Body was held in place by string, and hands were tied to the typewriter to simulate a man typing. On sheet in typewriter were typed three words: *My Last Mystery*. Experts say they were typed hunt-and-peck, therefore not by Waggoner, and presumably by the murderer.

Waggoner's severed head was sitting on a beer stein on the bookcase, eyes closed. The youngest trooper of the group fainted when a trick of rigor mortis made one eye

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open and wink at him as he was lifting head down.

Death was apparently caused by strangulation. The head was removed about two hours later, with an old saw. Very little flow of blood. Saw was hanging from a nail over the fireplace.

Newspaper reports of the manner in which the room was sealed from the inside — one-inch boards nailed closely together over both doors and all three windows — were accurate. Killer must have spent several hours preparing the place. When he had finished, a man trapped on the inside without tools would have starved to death before he could get out.

How killer got out, therefore, is driving the authorities nuts. Technical crews found the cottage normal in every respect. Solid floors, solid walls, solid roof, chimney flue only a few inches across, etc.

The saw, boards, nails, and hammer came from the garage, a former barn, where they'd been lying for several years. They were left there after Briscoe, the owner, and a former hired man named Jake built the cottage. Briscoe is noteworthy in the community for lack of energy.

There were no exterior clues such as footprints, and no interior clues as fingerprints, cigarette stubs, or the like.

The murderer's motive is just as baffling as how he got out. Waggoner had no close friends, no enemies, no relatives, and owned nothing of special value. Thus, no imaginable motive exists. And no reason for the elaborate hocus-pocus of the severed head, the sealed cottage, and so on.

The police are reduced to the theory that Waggoner was killed by some screwball, perhaps somebody who had read his books and decided to try his hand at a locked-room murder. This theory doesn't satisfy anybody, but it's the only one that makes even halfway sense.

There's no record of any stranger having been seen in the vicinity or of anyone having visited Waggoner. However, the cottage is almost hidden from the road and death occurred at least thirty-six hours before discovery, so half an army might have been around the place by the time State Police arrived.

One odd detail I almost left out: Waggoner's agent reports Waggoner expected to deliver a finished book to him inside of a week. But no sign of any ms. was found. Evidence of a lot of paper burned in the fireplace, but ashes had been stirred and could not be reconstructed.

That's it, Harry, that's all there is, there isn't any more.

But there was more, Harrison Mannix reflected. A great deal more. Waggoner *had* had something of value — the almost finished manuscript of his fifty-first locked-room

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mystery. The fact that the manuscript was missing could only mean one thing: he had been killed by another mystery writer.

Mannix brought his car to a stop in a tree-lined lane which ran past the cottage. There was a short cut through the trees, which he took at a trot. He emerged from the trees and hurried around the squat stone cottage with its flattish roof and low, overhanging eaves. Then he stopped, cursing.

A large wooden sign was propped up on the lawn:

SEE THE MURDER COTTAGE!
Everything Just As It Was Found!
MOST BAFFLING MYSTERY
OF THE CENTURY!!
Adults .....$.50
Children.....$.25
plus tax

Four cars were parked in a field across the main road, and a fat family of father (blue beret), mother (green sun visor), and daughter (12, lollypop) were just filing in the front door.

Standing outside was lanky Willy Briscoe, the farmer who owned the cottage. His features split in a grin.

"Back, eh, Mr. Mannix?" he said. "Come to have a look at th' scene of th' crime?"

Trust a Yankee to turn a dollar, even out of a murder, Mannix thought vexedly. But aloud he said:

"Just thought I'd stop by. After all, I was Waggoner's friend — almost his only friend."

"Eyup," Willy agreed solemnly. "Kept mighty close to himself, he did. But come in, Mr. Mannix — won't cost you nothin', seein' you're a neighbor."

"No," Mannix shook his head. "You're busy now, Willy, and I wanted to talk to you. I'll come by later."

"Okay, Mr. Mannix, got to give my lecture now." Willy Briscoe grinned again. "Goes over mighty well, it does, and I've got th' inside fixed up to give th' folks a real thrill."

Mannix hardly heard him. He was retreating before his deep annoyance made itself visible. These country people were easy to offend, and Willy Briscoe took offense more easily than most. A wrong word and it would have given the shiftless farmer malicious pleasure to bar him from the cottage indefinitely.

The rest of the day he waited impatiently for evening, knowing Willy would not leave the cottage while there was any hope of garnering a last half dollar from the curious. He did not go back on the chance of finding Willy there alone, for he wanted to have the place entirely to himself when he did enter it. He hoped that his first impression of the cottage might tell him something and he did not want to be distracted by Willy Briscoe's gangling presence.

As soon as it was decently dark and he had allowed Willy time enough to eat supper, he drove the two miles to the farmer's run-down establishment, which lay a quarter of a mile from the

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cottage. Willy's wife directed him to the sagging barn behind the house. He found Willy there, invisible under a jacked-up truck that was so rickety it should have adorned the town dump-heap. After a few moments, Willy crawled out and stood up.

"Evenin', Mr. Mannix." He showed snaggly teeth. "Got to do my fixin' up after dark now. Eyup, keeps me busy showin' folks through th' cottage. You'd be s'prised how much cash money I'm takin' in. Last Sunday forty people come by for a look."

"Willy," said Mannix, "Waggoner was my friend. It was I who persuaded him to come up here to live. I'd like to spend a little time in the cottage, to see if I can discover anything the police missed."

"Figurin' on findin' th' murderer?" The farmer's eyes half-closed in a shrewd grin. "Kind of thought you'd try your hand at it, seein' you write mysteries too."

"I want to see the killer punished," Mannix answered, untruthfully. "But tell me, Willy, you and your hired man built that cottage. If anybody can figure how the murderer got out —"

"Nope." Willy shook his head. "The police asked me that, too, and all I can tell you is what I told them. That there cottage is just a plain, ordinary cottage. More'n that I can't say. If you ask me, th' mystery ain't ever goin' to be solved."

"Just the same, I'd like to spend a couple of days in the cottage," Mannix told him. "I'll just sit there and try to figure out the answer. Maybe if I go at it as if I were working out a plot, I'll get the answer."

"I'd like to say yes," Willy answered insincerely, "but right now there's forty, fifty people a day wanting to go through that cottage and — Well, money's money, especially since farming don't pay so good."

Mannix restrained the retort that sprang to his lips. He had anticipated the objection and brought his checkbook. They finally settled that he could have the cottage completely to himself for three days for seventy-five dollars. He made out the check and left.

Mannix's impatience was too great to wait until morning. He drove directly to the cottage. Stumbling along the path to the front door after parking his car, he cursed his lack of foresight in failing to bring a flashlight.

In the darkness he bumped against the blatant sign Willy had erected. Then he found the new door that had been fitted and let himself in with the key the farmer had given him.

The unheated interior was damp and cold. Mannix shivered as he felt for the light switch. He found it, clicked it — and started violently. In the blaze of light, a man's headless body, the neck-stump crimson, was seated at a desk bending over a typewriter. The missing head, eyes staring at him, rested on a beer stein atop a bookcase.

It took Mannix a moment to realize they were wax, and this was what

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Willy had meant by saying he had fixed up the interior to give the folks a thrill. Even then his heartbeat returned to normal only slowly, and a feeling of cold repugnance refused to leave the pit of his stomach.

Conquering his revulsion, he picked up the dummy body and flung it onto a sofa. Then he took the trouble to stand on a chair and lift down the head, which he put beside the body, covering both with a small rug from the floor. After that he sat down at the desk and examined the room with a long, careful scrutiny.

Presently he was certain that no detail differed from his memory of the room as he had seen it on his occasional visits in the past. He had hoped something would obtrude upon his attention and give him a clue to the murderer's mode of exit, but he was disappointed.

Discarding the hope, he turned his attention to Waggoner's desk and began going through the papers in the drawers. The police had disturbed them, but seemingly not removed any, and finally he found the dead author's file of plot notes. This he leafed through eagerly.

Once again he was disappointed. There was not a phrase in it anywhere which could have referred to the locked-room plot Waggoner had mentioned at the MWA meeting.

Next he turned his attention to Waggoner's correspondence file. There was just a possibility the little man might have mentioned the plot in a letter — his correspondence had been voluminous, though he had said very little in person.

In the file beginning the first of September — the date Waggoner had mentioned on which the initial idea had come to him — were copies of half a dozen letters, and these Mannix read carefully. One was to Anthony Boucher, in Berkeley, California, and apparently carried on a previous dispute about the 1908 début of a long-forgotten opera star. The next, to Lillian de la Torre, in Colorado Springs, caustically corrected a mistake in the diameter of a hangman's rope in the days of Dr. Sam: Johnson. A third was a bitter note to Lawrence Blochman, castigating him for having his detective, Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee, find a specimen of the murderer's blood in the abdomen of a mosquito killed at the scene of the crime. Waggoner claimed to have conceived this idea first, and to have prior rights to it.

To Hugh Pentecost, Waggoner had written a five-page letter correcting a Pentecostal interpretation in modern psychiatry. Then Mannix found a scrawled note which raised his hopes. It said, *Write Ellery Queen about story.* Eagerly he turned to the letter pinned to it, which began, *Dear E. Q.: I understand that your Sixth Annual Contest for the best detective short story of the year, sponsored jointly by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine and Little, Brown & Company of Boston, is closing soon. I very much hope. . .*

Mannix put the letter back and continued going through the file. He

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found a note to Howard Haycraft, suggesting a revised edition of MURDER FOR PLEASURE, in which Gordon Waggoner would be acknowledged the dean of the locked-room mystery. A long letter to Bill Roos, half of the husband and wife team that signed itself Kelley Roos, suggested that they collaborate on a mystery musical comedy — Roos to supply the humor, Waggoner the mystery. There was also a complaint to Veronica Parker Johns, of the New York chapter of the MWA, pointing out that the name Gordon Waggoner had been spelled with only one *g* in the last issue of *The Third Degree* — was it too much to hope, Waggoner had written on the very day of his death, that after forty years and fifty volumes, fellow writers would know his name well enough to spell it correctly?

That was all for September. Mannix put the file away and, momentarily at a dead end, stood up and tugged at the boards which still covered all three windows, as well as the door that led to the bedroom. The boards were tightly nailed, so he abandoned further tests — they had been made more skillfully and exhaustively by experts.

The murderer had been in this room. He had got out of it. How he had accomplished this feat had been known only to him and to Gordon Waggoner. Waggoner was now dead. That left the killer in sole possession of the secret which Mannix was determined to uncover.

He could visualize the excitement, six months hence, when his book was published, revealing in fiction form the true story of Waggoner's murder. The publisher's publicity release — the apprehension of the guilty man (Mannix had no intention of having him caught before publication day, if he could prevent it). . . . It was a pleasant daydream and he put it away reluctantly, recognizing the bitter fact that so far the killer's secret was perfectly safe.

No, wait a minute! Waggoner had said the idea had come from a chance conversation. He had even specified the day — Friday, September 1. If it were possible to discover with whom Waggoner had talked that day — and if it were possible to reconstruct the conversations — Mannix might still be able to evolve the whole escape method, just as Waggoner had originally.

But was it possible to check back to the people with whom Waggoner had spoken so many weeks before? Mannix's active mind began to gnaw at the problem. Waggoner had been here in the country at the time. Mentally, Mannix listed the men Waggoner might conceivably have chatted with that day: Jody Pine, the rural mail-carrier; Miss Rorick, the postmistress; Miss Bunce, the librarian; Nahum Brown, manager of the gas station which serviced Waggoner's car; Myron Stuart, the bank manager; McCready, the manager of the grocery. Waggoner came in contact with these people about once a

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week, and had a chatting acquaintance with them. He saw no one else more than once or twice a month, not even Briscoe, his landlord.

Mannix determined to question all the individuals he had mentally listed. Even if they had talked to Waggoner that Friday, it was unlikely they would remember what had been said. But it was worth a try.

Abandoning temporarily the problem of the killer's escape from the sealed room, Mannix next considered his identity.

He had already decided the murderer must be a mystery writer — probably a fellow MWA member. Only another detective-story writer could have had a motive — the new locked-room plot. Though Waggoner had insisted to Mannix that he hadn't mentioned the plot to anyone else, he *must* have let it slip out at the meeting. Someone else had learned of it, had surreptitiously visited Waggoner, killed him, read the manuscript and burned it, then —

No, he must proceed more slowly, more logically.

First, *would* another writer kill for a plot, however brilliant? It was farfetched, but not impossible. A good plot was money in the bank, and there were several members who might go to great lengths to refurbish their waning reputations. Perhaps one, more desperate than anyone realized —

Mannix paused in his thoughts to consider the roster of possible suspects. There were perhaps 250 writers in the MWA — four-fifths of all the mystery writers in America. Of these, at least 150 belonged to the New York chapter, with sizeable groups located in Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

At least 80 writers had been present at that September meeting, and most of them, with the exception of a corporal's guard who had traveled from Boston, Philadelphia, and Washington to be present, lived within two hours' drive of Waggoner's cottage. Many lived closer. There were, for instance, Bruno Fischer and Lawrence Treat, both in northern Westchester, no more than an hour away.

Percival Wilde, Hugh Pentecost, Georges Simenon, the Kelley Rooses, George Harmon Coxe — all lived in Connecticut, within easy driving distance. Others were clustered thickly in the Larchmont-Mamaroneck area — the names of John Dickson Carr, Herbert Brean, Clayton Rawson leaped to his mind. There were more, Mannix knew, if he cared to check. But he could not seriously visualize any of them playing the role of a murderer. All were more than competent enough to create their own plots, and at considerably less risk.

Nevertheless, someone — his leaping thoughts reined up sharply at an obstacle he had not previously envisioned. The whole case had the touch one usually found in third-rate melodramas — the boarded windows, the message on the sheet in the typewriter, the severed head on a beer stein.

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From whatever angle you approached the case it reeked of the literary touch, as if a writer had at last discarded paper and typewriter and written his work in deeds, not words. But — and this was the obstacle he could not bypass — if a writer had killed Waggoner for his locked-room gimmick, why had he immediately wasted the idea by translating it into actuality?

Obviously, now, the killer would hardly dare reveal his method of escape by putting it into a book. That would be virtually admitting he was the murderer. Of course he himself hoped to use the idea in a book, but that was different: he had an alibi.

No, the two conclusions were antagonistic: only a mystery writer could be guilty — but no mystery writer would have used Waggoner's locked-room idea as the actual scene of the crime.

Mannix's thoughts revolved fruitlessly, and it was only the opening of the outside door that put a period to them. Startled, he turned. Willy Briscoe was just entering.

"Just come over to make sure I locked up, and seen the light, Mr. Mannix," Willy said apologetically. "Didn't know you was planning to come here tonight."

"I just wanted to get a preliminary impression," Mannix said, annoyed. "But I guess it's time to go now."

"Sure hope you figure it out," Willy told him, nodding his head briskly. "Poor Mr. Waggoner, he might have sat here dead for weeks till I come to collect th' rent, if Jody Pine hadn't had that special-delivery letter to give him."

Mannix stared at him, cigarette frozen in his lips.

"Willy," he said, his tongue strangely thick with tension, "sit down. I'd like to talk to you."

"Sure." Willy Briscoe sat down on an antique ladder-back chair that had been Waggoner's pride. "What about?"

"Willy," Harrison Mannix asked, "you were here at the cottage on September first?"

"Sure, to collect th' rent, like always on the first."

"The rent! Of course. And you talked to Mr. Waggoner? In fact, I think you mentioned an idea for a mystery story to him. Right?"

"You bet I did!" Willy's face flushed, and his lips twisted with remembered anger. "I been reading his books from th' liberry and I noticed they was always about murders in a room all locked up or nailed shut, or similar. And it come to me I knew a way to get out of a locked-up room he hadn't ever used. So I asked him what th' idea'd be worth to him. He said he'd have to hear it first, so I told him. Right away he said it had been used a dozen times.

"Well, I'd believed him when he said my idea wasn't any good. Then one day I come to fix th' water pump — he'd called up to complain about it — and he was in th' village. But th' door was unlocked. So I come in and see some writin' on his desk and looked at it and there it was — my

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idea that he'd stole and was usin' in a book!"

The farmer paused, breathing hard, and Mannix felt his heart hammering with excitement. So Waggoner had lied! Not a chance conversation, but a suggestion given to him by an amateur! Every mystery writer had plots suggested to him by amateurs — absurd, impossible plots; but this one hadn't been impossible!

"Then what happened, Willy?" His tone was soothing. "Waggoner came home and you quarreled with him. Right?"

"Yes, blast him!" Willy shouted. "Caught me readin' th' story and lit into me. And I lit into him for stealin' my idea after sayin' it wasn't any good."

"So you killed him," Mannix said, half to himself.

"Yep, I killed him!" Willy said, hands clenching. "He'd said my idea was no good and he lied to me and tried to cheat me, and before I knowed what I was doing I was choking him by the throat. And before I could stop, he was dead."

Willy stopped, as if realizing for the first time what he had said. Mannix nodded reassuringly.

"I understand, Willy," he said. "I'd have done the same thing. But after you killed him you nailed this cottage shut from the inside. Was that to fool the police?"

"No." Willy shrugged. "If I'd wanted just to fool them I'd 'a' took Mr. Waggoner's money and messed up th' house — then it'd look like a tramp done it. But he said my idea wasn't any good. And I knew it was. I couldn't write it in a book, like him, but by thunder I could show it was good! And I did! That's why I fixed the cottage up all nailed shut from the inside, like in the idea I give him."

"And cutting off his head was part of the idea?"

"Sure," Willy told him. "There's always some crazy stuff like that in a mystery story — you know, a crazy statue from Africa or Egypt or somethin'. So I cut off his head to make it interestin', and wrote on his typewriter, '*My Last Mystery.*' I wanted to stab him with a jeweled dagger too, only I didn't have one."

Mannix swelled with triumph. Waggoner *had* been killed by a mystery writer! An illiterate who could only get "published" by acting out his plot in reality.

"Willy," he said, "the more I think about it, the more I think you were perfectly justified in killing Waggoner. So I won't say anything about it to anybody. And I have a proposition to make to you. *I'll* buy your idea. If you'll tell me how you got out of this room I'll pay you five hundred dollars."

Willy Briscoe brightened.

"Honest?" he said. "All right, it's a deal. I'll do better'n tell you — I'll show you."

He rose and came forward with outstretched, work-hardened hands. . . .

Willy Briscoe stood by the fireplace and surveyed the room. The new

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front door was nailed tightly shut. The windows remained boarded up just as they had been since Waggoner's death.

Harrison Mannix sat erect in the chair just before the typewriter.

Harrison Mannix's head rested on the beer stein on top of the bookcase ten feet away, wide-open eyes surveying the headless body.

The saw which had effected the separation hung above the fireplace.

In all essential respects the room was exactly as it had been the morning Waggoner's body had been discovered — except, of course, for the change in the cast which now put Harrison Mannix in the leading role.

Satisfied Willy turned out the light and, approaching the stone fireplace, climbed upward, using the rough stones of the fireplace for toe holds.

Just a few feet to the left of the chimney was one of the corners of the room. And in that corner there was now an eighteen-inch gap where the roof failed to meet the walls.

Willy wriggled through the gap and dropped to the ground outside.

Then he turned his attention to the sturdy truck-jack, which was now exerting its power against a six-by-six timber, thrust under the corner of the overhanging roof. A turn at a time in the darkness, and Willy eased off the pressure. The roof settled down until once again it rested, with every appearance of solidity, on the walls. The timber which had lifted it started to fall and Willy caught it dexterously.

"Look at a house with a roof on, it looks like a mighty solid piece of building," he muttered aloud. "Easy to forget a roof has to be put on and what can be put on can be took off — or lifted. If'n a real carpenter had builded this house, might not be so easy. But me'n Jake run out of big nails the day we framed this end of th' roof. Always meant to put in a few, but never got around to it. Lucky, way it's turned out."

He carried the truck-jack to a wheelbarrow, tossed it in, and laid the timber across the barrow. Using a flashlight, he made sure there were no significant marks left in the gravel drive where the jack had stood. Then he trundled the wheelbarrow down the road, back to his barn and to the truck that had been in the process of being repaired for two months now.

"Expect they'll be a good lot of excitement when the time Mr. Mannix paid me for is up and I go over to open up th' cottage," he reflected. "But won't nobody think of me. They'll be too excited over th' mystery." Then another thought occurred to him.

"Likely I'll be takin' forty, fifty dollars a week out'n that cottage, showin' it to summer folks the next ten years," he murmured, smacking his thin lips. "That's better'n writin' for a livin' any day!"

(*Further author-editor comments on the following page*)

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Now, it cannot be denied that the author of "The 51st Sealed Room; or, The MWA Murder" is an ingenious fellow. If there is still any doubt in your mind, let us add one more piece of evidence. The author, Robert Arthur, claims that his story is "the most realistic locked-room story ever composed." You question that statement? Then let Mr. Arthur himself substantiate this claim.

In fiction, says Mr. Arthur, most murders are the result of long and crafty planning. In real life, however, about 80 percent of all homicides (excluding those caused by vehicles) are the result of quarrels. Mr. Arthur's MWA murder is the result of a quarrel.

— realism factor.....80%

In fiction, most murderers are caught. In real life, most murderers get away with it — at least 65% (Mr. Arthur's statistics). In the story you have just read the murderer gets away with it.

— realism factor.....65%

In real life, most quarrels occur between relatives. The next highest quarrel-group is that of landlord and tenant — 85%. In Mr. Arthur's story the quarrel is between a landlord and a tenant.

— realism factor.....85%

In real life, locked-room murders are committed only by writers. Mr. Arthur's locked-room killer is a "writer."

— realism factor.....100%

In real life, most writers never get into print — 99%. Mr. Arthur's writer-killer could never possibly get into print.

— realism factor.....99%

In fiction, most murderers are highly intelligent, if otherwise lacking in civilized virtues. In real life, most murderers are of low intelligence — 90%. Mr. Arthur's killer is of low intelligence.

— realism factor.....90%

Thus, for six important factors in the story, the average probability quotient is 86.5%. Any story with a realism factor of 86.5% is so close to a "sure thing" that it is bound to come to life, bound to happen to someone soon. Indeed, with so high a probability factor, it can be maintained that the story you have just read will actually occur in real life to a detective-story writer now living in Connecticut. Forewarned is forearmed: take heed Hugh Pentecost, Percival Wilde, George Harmon Coxe, Kelley Roos, Georges Simenon — and Robert Arthur!

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THE HAIR SHIRT

by ROY VICKERS

IT IS DEBATABLE whether the man who is in love with his own moral rectitude is a shining example to others, or a bit of a stumbling block. In the matter of Elsie Potter, Jeremy Grantham — even his name has a ring of sternness — tried himself at the bar of his own conscience and gave himself a brutally stiff sentence. Anybody could have told him that this sort of thing is a moral stupidity, but few would have prophesied that it would lead to murder.

As to Elsie Potter, she was no more of a humbug than many another good-looking girl who works fairly hard for a living but yearns for a life of well-fed indolence — to be obtained on give-and-take terms, which include somewhere a niche for her self-respect.

In no sense did Elsie ensnare him. She had never attempted to ensnare anybody. She meant to do so, one day, but kept putting it off, partly through lack of raw material. But she did spend a disproportionately large slice of her salary, as a typist in a corset factory, on personal adornment. Grantham was a provincial wholesaler in women's underwear, and Elsie was lent to him by her employers who were putting on a special evening display at the Business Exhibition at Olympia in 1931.

The special display was over by ten. Grantham, a townsman of some importance in Benchester, was unsure of himself in London. He was not certain whether he was expected to tip her, and shrank from experimenting. Her business manners were good. He invited her to supper.

She left the talking to him, thereby leading him to believe that she was attentive and sympathetic. A slightly idealized version of his life story emerged, revealing sundry wistful little virtues of his own which had hitherto escaped his notice. He enjoyed his supper, which ended all too soon.

"There are people waiting for our table. Would you mind coming to the hotel, Miss Potter, to read over your notes?" Apart from the notes, he wanted to tell her how he had felt when his father's failing health had compelled him to enter the family business, though he had always felt that he had been meant for a very different kind of life.

"Certainly, Mr. Grantham," said Elsie, with no other thought in her mind than that the firm was paying her overtime. She had not considered him as a man, because he seemed to her to be "old," though he was but hovering on the brink of his fortieth birthday. All the same, she had noticed that he was good-looking "in a way" — rather like the sheriffs in the Western films, the good ones under a cloud who were too proud to explain until the end.

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He had a two-room suite in the Gulverbury Hotel. We are not concerned with the details of Jeremy Grantham's breach of his own somewhat rigid code, except to emphasize that it was unpremeditated. He was unconscious of depravity when he thanked her for her company. Elsie took it for granted that he would give her a goodbye kiss — which was only fair, after that expensive supper! — and to that extent may have put the idea into his head, not suspecting that it was, to him, a revolutionary idea.

The kiss, in fact, caused havoc in the brain of Jeremy Grantham. He used neither force nor artifice to induce her to stay. With compelling sincerity he stammered out a tale of inner loneliness and frustration — which was such unexpected behavior on the part of the "good sheriff" that Elsie was fascinated. He was old, of course, but not wrinkled. . . .

Jeremy Grantham was awakened by the clatter of a spoon in a tea cup. He was one of those heavy sleepers who require several seconds to get their bearings. He stared at Elsie in alarm.

"The chambermaid brought your tea. She got a bit of a shock when I opened the door." Elsie set the tray on a bedside table. "You go ahead. I don't take early tea — it's bad for you, at my age."

She had bathed, but was not fully dressed. She was wearing his raincoat, after rolling back the sleeves, and knew that she looked ridiculous. As Grantham sat bolt upright in bed and continued to stare at her, she slipped out of the coat.

When he spoke, his voice was rather like that of a "bad sheriff."

"I congratulate you! I walked into the trap as carelessly as some loose young undergraduate."

"Trap!" echoed Elsie, puzzled. "What trap? Come on, tell me what you mean by 'trap.' I want to know."

"You've earned your laugh at my expense. I'll own up I was taken in by your friendliness and what I believed to be the kindness of your nature."

"I can't help what you thought. What d'you mean by 'trap'?"

"It ended in my spending the night with you!"

"I like *that!* I definitely do!" Elsie, as she would have expressed it, could hardly believe her ears. "You're making out it was all my fault. You weren't drunk — you can remember what happened if you choose to. When I said it was getting late and you said it had been a pleasant evening, I was going straight out of here. And then you started asking me to stay. And I told you at first that I didn't want to. And you kept on at me, saying it was a matter of life an' death and all that, and in the end I said I would. D'you remember that, or don't you?"

Before all else Grantham was, he had so often told himself, a completely truthful man.

"Yes, I remember." The words had come with difficulty. "I apologize. I spoke hastily."

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"You did!" She put on her dress, giving him an odd sense of being thrust back again into the fog of inhibition from which he had escaped.

"I have behaved unforgivably," he faltered. "I have done a great wrong. I must make amends."

Her laugh jarred his whole nervous system.

"Make amends, eh! With a handout of *cash*, no doubt!" she shrilled. "I know! I've read about your sort in books. There's just one thing you've got dead wrong, Mr. Grantham. It isn't you that's been a fool over this — it's me!"

After she had gone he sat long — upright in the bed — staring at the wallpaper. At eleven the transcription of his notes arrived by special messenger. By twelve he had concluded his meditation, whereupon he proceeded to prompt and effective action.

When Elsie returned to her desk after the lunch interval she found a slip on her typewriter in red ink.

Miss Potter to report to Mr. J. Grantham at Gulverbury Hotel.

I believe that man is loopy, she told herself. Loopy enough to tell the firm? Hardly! More likely, he was trying to stage a comeback by finding fault with her script. Some men were mean enough for anything!

When she was shown into his sitting room, he did not look loopy. He looked once more like the "good sheriff," just before the happy ending.

"You did me an injustice this morning, Miss Potter, when you assumed that I intended to offer you money. That would have been to double my offense."

"Well, I'm sure I don't want to talk about it, if you don't."

"Please allow me to speak first." He placed a chair for her and she sat down obediently. "After you left here I reviewed the circumstances in minute detail. I acquit myself only of deceit. What I told you about myself was wholly true. It is true that I have never kissed a woman until I kissed you."

That, thought Elsie, explained a lot. Her rancor vanished.

"I do not put that forward as an excuse for my subsequent conduct. I repeat that I wish to make amends. I want you to marry me."

"*Ooh!*" The life of well-fed indolence was beckoning. Not on the swimming-pool scale, of course, but perhaps an eight-room house and two resident servants — the respectful kind — who would admire her clothes. There was now only that awkward little niche for the self-respect to be considered.

"I don't know what to say, Mr. Grantham, really! I'm sorry I was rude this morning, not understanding what was in your mind. And now you ask me to marry you!" The niche, after all, might as well be a roomy one. "I only want to say — well, I mean you don't have to feel you ought to marry me if you don't want to. Doing me wrong, and all that! It's nice of you to put it that way. But it's only fair to say I knew what I was

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doing and I could have walked out of here, all right, if I'd really wanted to."

She expected a gracious acknowledgment, but he only bowed as if he wished she would stop talking.

"I am waiting for your answer, Miss Potter. Will you agree to marry me?"

He was loopy, of course — in a way. But a girl had to take care of herself, and she had given him a fair chance to back out. No one could say she had laid a trap for him. Come to think of it, he wasn't really old at all, if you looked at him properly.

"If you're sure you want to, Mr. Grantham, I do too! I'll do my best to make you happy."

"You need have no anxiety on that score. The burden of adaptation will be exclusively mine. I will study your tastes. And — er — do *my* best to make *you* happy."

It was, she decided, a rather nice kind of loopiness.

"Do you think your friends will like me?" They would adore her, she hoped he would say, for her unspoiled charm — and possibly also for her taste in dress, in which the provinces were deemed to be deficient.

"That need concern you no more than it concerns me," he said. "The essential point is that you have consented to marriage. You need not return to the office. I will telephone and make the necessary arrangements — your employers can easily hire another typist. Please write down your full name, age, and address, and the names and occupations of your parents. I shall see my solicitors and we can be married in four days."

"*Ooh!* I shan't have time to get any clothes together."

"You can go from here to Harridge's and order what you want. By the time you get there I shall have opened an account."

This was concrete. This was wonderful. She would have hugged him, but he held her off.

"Not again — not until after we're married!" he said.

Elsie had never scamped her work at the office, had never refused a kiss or two to a man who had paid for her evening's entertainment. There really was an eight-room house, detached, in Benchester, and two servants and a car and credit in all the shops for anything, within the limits of common sense, which might contribute to her comfort or her pleasure. Her purse, too, was always comfortably lined. She stuck to her own rules — she exerted herself in fulfillment of her promise to do her best to make him happy.

She knew that in brief, ecstatic moments she succeeded — and was therefore the more surprised when his strange shyness of her failed to disappear from their everyday life. Any casual endearment or familiarity on her part would freeze him up, make him look as if he were ashamed of himself. He did not like her to touch him — except when he lost his head, as he called it — and then he would burst out of his shell and reveal a nor-

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mal, if somewhat excessively romantic, attitude.

The two servants, she had to admit, were not of the respectful kind. They were both older than Jeremy and exhibited no sign of admiring her clothes. Nor did they perceptibly obey her, though they were willing to accept her as the mouthpiece of Grantham's wishes. In other respects, the reality exceeded the dream.

With the single exception noted, Jeremy seemed to be cut in the pattern of an ideal husband. He was an almost incredibly good-tempered man. When small things went wrong — caused, perhaps, by her unpunctuality or forgetfulness — he never blamed her. With a patient smile he would beg her not to blame herself. Patience, indeed, was the keynote of his domestic life — though she had heard him speak sharply and even angrily on the telephone to a subordinate at his warehouse.

He was very considerate, too. He ordered the picture papers for her. When he thought she did not understand the news of the day he put himself to the trouble of explaining. She was not interested in the kind of news that had to be explained, but she appreciated his desire to entertain her.

The second phase of the marriage began with the first formal dinner party. In Benchester the social traditions of the middle classes lingered. Elsie assumed that success would pivot on her dress and that Harridge's would carry her to triumph.

She did not suspect that there might be a ritual with which she was unfamiliar — such as being "taken into dinner." For a moment she was angry with Jeremy for his thoughtlessness in not warning her. The knives and forks, too, were laid out on a system not employed in the restaurants which she had frequented. But she was quick as a town sparrow at that kind of thing and was soon able to feel that she was holding her own, while standing by for surprises.

The conversation showed a lamentable tendency to run into blind alleys. There was, for instance, the weather which, to Elsie, was purely a problem of adjusting one's clothing. But Jeremy's friends talked about it as if it were a sort of business, making plans about it for months ahead. Another stumbling block was gardening — apparently she was expected to know the names of all the flowers and how they grew. The worst humiliation of all was when she herself turned the conversation to London. These incredible provincials seemed to know London as well as they knew Benchester — more accurately, they knew a London which was as remote to Elsie as Vienna. Her dress held its own, but that was about all you could say for it.

"I was a flop! I've let you down to your friends, Jeremy. I'm ever so sorry about it."

Perhaps she hoped he would tell her she was exaggerating, that a little strangeness on both sides must be expected at first, that her different way of looking at things was itself attractive to his friends. Unspoiled charm,

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you could call it, at a pinch. Anyhow, it would be nice if he were to say it.

"It's of no importance whatever, my dear. I assure you that you have not — as you put it — let me down. Get rid of that fear, if you have it, Elsie. In no circumstances, whatever might happen, could you let me down. I told you as much when I asked you to marry me."

"Dear Jeremy! You are *so* kind to me!" she sobbed.

Lying awake that night she found his words repeating themselves in her memory. He was very kind to her. But he had a funny way of saying kind things. Sort of a legal way. As if he didn't *want* to be kind to her but had to be. It was her first approach to the truth about her marriage, but she was slow in following it up.

The dinner parties, including those given at home, spread over three months, interspersed with callers whose calls had to be returned. She rarely made the same gaffe twice, but carefulness was not enough. His friends showed no personal interest in her. Within the framework of tolerable behavior people tended to leave her out of the conversation.

The solitary exception was Millard, a go-ahead auctioneer who had been a senior gas officer in the Kaiser's war. But the nature of his interest was soon obvious — and Elsie had snubbed him, with some enjoyment.

In six months it all petered out and there followed a period of blessed, if monotonous, peacefulness, in which she no longer had to scan the picture papers for drawing-room topics. Nobody cut her: chance meetings always evoked a civil exchange. But invitations were neither given nor accepted. Eighteen months after their wedding she faced the facts.

"All your friends have dropped off because of me!"

"If that does not distress me, why should it distress you?" The patient smile had come into action.

"Jeremy, did you know it was going to happen like this?"

She had found out that he would never tell the smallest lie, even in trivial things, to save his own or anyone else's face.

"In so far as I considered the matter at all, I was aware that your early circumstances had been so different from theirs that you would not be likely to have much in common. It will leave us more time together, Elsie. I am afraid you do not care for chess. We must get a little variety into our evenings. Perhaps you would like a radio?"

"That would be no good if nobody ever came here to dance," objected Elsie, who knew no other use for music.

She heard him take a long breath.

"I have an idea!" he exclaimed. The patient smile took on the semblance of a grin. "You teach me to dance!"

The idea of teaching the "good sheriff" to dance was too much for her. She laughed until she was crying bitterly and he was doing his best to soothe her.

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"Don't cry, Elsie! Those are real tears." He sounded almost frightened. "Elsie! When you cry, you accuse me of failure. You're robbing me of my right to make amends. Elsie, I'll do anything within the moral law to make you happy."

He was so worked up that he lost his shyness, and by the next morning Elsie had forgotten how it all started. But his words echoed deep down in her subconsciousness, waiting, as it were, to swim up into her mind.

Dancing being barred, Grantham began to take her regularly to the better of the two local moving-picture houses. He was honorary secretary of the Benchester Annual Fair, an institution of more than a thousand years standing, and so of national interest. The rent paid by concessionaires for the three days alone covered more than half the rates of the sizeable town. Grantham's position entailed a good deal of confidential clerking. Elsie gladly agreed to help, preferring a little work to parlor games. As she had a neat, legible handwriting, everybody was pleased.

For another six months his inescapable kindness flowed over her. Then she bolted back to London with fifteen pounds and a couple of suitcases.

She put up at a hotel and applied unsuccessfully to have her old job back. She went to an agency, who submitted her to a test and told her that she was too slow and that her fingering was defective, which she acknowledged to be true. She would need a refresher course — and she could not afford one. There came to her the first suspicion that she had made a fool of herself in running away.

The hotel — which she had formerly thought good enough — she now discovered to be an abominable place. The bedroom was dirty and cold, and the food was inedible. Two years of well-fed indolence had changed her perspective. In a few days restaurants and a few other such necessaries had made an alarming hole in her reserve.

Grantham picked her up through the agency, decided that it would be prudent to let her have a week of it. Then he buttonholed her as she returned to the hotel in early evening.

"I have taken rooms for us at the Savoy," he said. "We can go home when we've had a little holiday and we need never mention the last miserable week for the rest of our lives."

"I'll pack my bags and join you in half an hour. You are very kind to me, Jeremy," she said, and for the first time did not mean it.

Dimly she had begun to realize that he was not, in the accepted sense, kind to her. He had now revealed that he wanted her even more than she herself wanted a life of well-fed indolence. To this she was able to add that he did not want her as other men sometimes want wives who run away by themselves. She knew well that he never thought of her like that except when he "lost his head." And he always tried not to lose his head.

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She had tried to break away and had failed. She returned to Benchester with a feeling that she was being dragged back in chains, but that the chains, in some inexplicable way, weighed more heavily on Jeremy Grantham than on herself.

The patient smile had lost none of its impersonal benevolence. His kindness continued unabated. Her new, undefined resentment made her exploit it. Soon she was running Millard, the local auctioneer, on a string, occasionally allowing him to share her table when she took morning coffee while shopping. She invariably reported such incidents, endowing Millard with an attractiveness which he did not possess for her — in the vain hope of arousing her husband's protest.

In time she was playing the game of seeing how far she could go.

She submitted him to calculated interruptions. She indulged in tantrums. She was an hour late for dinner. But she never plumbed the depth of his tolerance, though she exhausted her energy and her cunning in the attempt to exasperate him at least into some angry rebuke.

Elsie was not consistent, any more than she was heroic. There were times when she was ashamed of her conduct.

"I'm sorry I've been so beastly. You must hate me sometimes."

"Never!" he asserted. "You have done nothing for which you need apologize to me."

"I'll try to behave better."

"Please do nothing of the kind." His tone gave his words the force of an earnest entreaty. Then came that other phrase she had heard so often before: "If it doesn't distress me, why should it distress you?"

She felt that she was on the brink of a discovery, but she lacked the ability to widen her investigation. Nevertheless, she became intuitively aware that he derived some kind of satisfaction out of being kind and forgiving when she was making an unreasonable nuisance of herself. He liked forgiving her. So he liked her to do something he could forgive. She lost her sense of power over him and stopped trying to irritate him.

Illumination came, indirectly, through a chance phrase which she overheard at the Fair. With another friend of Jeremy's was Millard, who had soured under her refusal to advance their relations. Both men greeted them as they were leaving a flower marquee. A moment later Elsie discovered that she had dropped a glove, probably in the marquee, and turned back. As she passed behind them Millard remarked to his companion:

"Poor old Grantham! Still wearing his hair shirt. Must be her looks."

The phrase "hair shirt" eluded her. At home, the abridged dictionary failed to give enlightenment. She would find out from Jeremy himself. But she would go about it carefully, in case it meant something dangerous.

"There's something I wanted to ask you about — I read it in the paper yesterday — can't remember what it

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was." She rang the changes on that, and then: "Oh, I remember! It was about somebody wearing a hair shirt. There isn't such a thing, is there? What does it mean?"

"It was a medieval form of self-torture. Monks would wear a hair shirt to atone for sin." He added: "In modern English, it means something humiliating and painful which you've imposed on yourself as a punishment."

So it did mean something dangerous! Elsie felt her cheeks burning, felt the heat spreading in a tidal wave over her whole body. Suddenly it all added up. Jeremy was a sort of monk himself — he regarded that night at the Gulverbury as a deadly sin. Making amends! But not to her, to himself. He had married her as "something humiliating and painful" imposed on himself as a punishment for "losing his head." She was precious to him because he hated every minute he spent with her.

There floated in her mind's eye the day of her mother's funeral. All that trouble having a baby and struggling to bring her up in decency, and then have a man wear her as a hair shirt! Her hand closed on a table knife. A moment later, she dropped it and giggled. How silly! You couldn't kill anybody with a table knife.

She could go back to London again. She would need a refresher course. She would also need, she now understood, a strength of character which was beyond her reach. Actually, of course, she would go on being a hair shirt. The niche reserved for the housing of her self-respect had been walled up, so it didn't matter any more what she did.

The mind of Elsie Potter was barely capable of grasping a moral abstraction. She did not put it to herself that Jeremy Grantham was subjecting her personality to a form of protracted murder from which, being herself, she could not escape. In its own thought forms, her intuition perceived that he was using her as a guinea pig for an experiment in moral rectitude — that to him her hopes and fears, her good and ill temper, and her attempts at companionship, were all part of the experiment.

Nor, at this stage, did she consciously set herself to the task of murdering him. She was a creature of reaction. She found herself spending more and more time in daydreaming about killing. Just killing in general.

In this matter the films were obviously unreliable. You shot a man; and if he was a bad man he died at once. But if he was a good man he often turned out to be only slightly wounded, or at least he lived long enough to deliver one of those speeches that sometimes made you cry. Perhaps Jeremy would be rated as a good man. Anyhow, she hadn't a gun.

The fantasy persisted throughout the winter. Her self-respect, which had given no trouble when it had a niche of its own, now asserted itself in a disturbing manner. She was eating and sleeping badly. At times she would wander about the house for an hour on end; at other times she would

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sit stock-still, neglecting her few duties, thinking of nothing at all.

The sudden passing of her melancholy can be timed, almost to the minute. It occurred at a little after half-past ten on the first night of June 1934. They had been to the pictures. On the hall table, addressed to Grantham, was a brown paper package, much bespattered with sealing wax.

"That's the Report Book!" said Grantham. "Bewley must have brought it just after we left. That means the committee are in a hurry. We shall have to look sharp about filling it in."

"We can begin now, if you like."

"Certainly not! You're tired, my dear, and so am I. You can start on it tomorrow while I'm at the office. It's — hm! — ten thirty-one, to be precise. The staff has gone to bed." And then came that dreadful little speech he made every night throughout the summer months. "I may as well go and turn off the gas main. No need to take unnecessary risks."

Gas was used for cooking and for stoves in the upper rooms. In the winter it was left on at the main because they liked to use the stove when going to bed. The hypothetical risk of fire was no greater in summer than in winter. Yet, nearly every night of summer, he made that absurd little excuse about unnecessary risk. If only he would put it into other words sometimes —

The gas!

It was as if the words had been shouted inside her brain. The listlessness slipped from her with her cloak. The childish fantasies of guns and poison and pushing people over cliffs vanished in a clear-cut plan. Every detail flashed instantly into place, making a single picture in her mind's eye.

Grantham had put the package in the morning room and passed through the baize door to the kitchen quarters. Elsie hurried up to their bedroom, whipped off an undergarment and thrust it into the flue of the gas stove, above the asbestos and out of sight.

Jeremy's bed was nearer the gas stove. She would have to walk round in the dark. She measured the distance with her eye, had time to pace it out before he appeared. She did not know that she was smiling.

"Elsie, my dear, you look happy."

"Do I? I expect that's because I feel better."

"I am so very glad. When you are miserable, I get the feeling that everything I have tried to do for you has achieved nothing."

That was what made him miserable — the fear that the experiment was failing and that he was wearing the hair shirt for nothing. She warned herself not to get angry with him or he might lie awake.

She succeeded in keeping him pleased with himself and he did not lie awake. She had suffered much from his snoring, before she had grown used to it, but now she was glad of it. She slipped out of bed, took her measured paces to the gas stove. The films were reliable instructors in the

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danger of fingerprints, so she turned on the tap of the gas stove with the hem of her night-dress.

Shutting the window was the next step. If the sashes screamed as they did sometimes, the noise might wake even Jeremy and she would have to say that she was too hot and was trying to open it wider.

She applied pressure gradually and the sashes did not scream. The snoring maintained its even timing. The door was much easier than the window.

On her way downstairs in the dark two of the stairs creaked. Even if the servants heard it on the top floor, which was unlikely, they would take no notice.

In the hall she stood for a minute or more in the dark, listening. Then she passed through the baize door to the kitchen quarters. She did not turn on the light. The blinds had not been drawn, and there was enough light from the stars.

In the act of touching the main tap she snatched back her hand. Over the sink a dish-cloth was hanging, to dry. With the cloth she turned the main tap full on. With the cloth, too, she turned one of the taps of the cooker, to check: when the low hiss of gas told her that she had made no mistake, she turned it off. She replaced the dish-cloth on the hanger above the sink.

Back through the baize door to the morning room, which Jeremy called his study. She sat down and contemplated the fact that the gas was flowing up the pipe into the room in which Jeremy was sleeping.

The servants would get up at seven, and at eight would bring early tea for Jeremy. She must sit in that chair until half-past six. It was now only a little past midnight.

Suppose she failed? Suppose Jeremy woke up before the gas had time to kill him and came downstairs and found her there? She laughed silently. She would tell him that she had tried to kill him — and let him see if he could make amends for that!

He wanted to make her happy. He would succeed — tomorrow. She gave little thought to the life of well-fed indolence, believing that the law compelled a husband to make provision for his wife.

She began to wonder why the dawn was so long in coming. In the summertime you ought to be able to see it at about three, in June. Again and again her eyes traveled to the window. Then the clock in the hall struck one.

I've been here less than an hour, she told herself with the first twinge of anxiety. She had no idea that time could drag like that. Sitting alone and quiet in the dark, suppose she were to fall asleep in that chair? The danger was too real to be ignored. She adjusted the window blinds, then turned on the light, determined to do something that would occupy her mind.

To occupy her mind was no easy task, even when others were cooperating. She looked around the room. There were plenty of Jeremy's books; but these, she knew by experience, positively induced sleep. Finally, she hit on an intelligent compromise. You

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never dropped off to sleep when you were writing. And there was the Report Book for the committee which Jeremy had asked her to work on.

She was soon immersed in the work. There were the names, numbered, of everybody who had taken part in last year's Fair — local notabilities, local nobodies, and stall and booth holders. Page after page contained blanks for figures and comments to be filled in from the secretary's notes. She had done all the filing herself under Jeremy's direction. Millard's name occurred among the locals, with a suggestion that he should be invited to join the committee. She looked at Jeremy's note. There were two notes, one of which had been struck out. This she promptly deciphered — four lines to the effect that Millard was a man of substance and a good mixer. The later note, dated ten days previously, was in a different vein: *Objection: Financially very insecure.*

She bore Millard no malice for calling her a hair shirt. That very morning she had let him linger at her coffee table for a couple of minutes; he had stuck to the safe topic of the next Fair. To bar him because, one day, he might be hard up seemed a very mean sort of reason. Against Millard's name she wrote *Recommended.*

Dawn broke unnoticed by Elsie. By twenty past six she had finished the whole job. Illogically, she felt pleased, because Jeremy had thought it would take both of them longer than five hours.

Presently she went upstairs. Damp towels, she suspected, would be useless against gas. She must hold her breath, or she would be killed herself. With one hand on the door knob she took three slow, deep breaths.

Then she opened the door, shut it, went to the gas stove, removed her undergarment from the flue, and was back on the landing with the door shut, without having drawn breath.

After a brief rest she again breathed deeply, then repeated her performance, except that this time she opened the window. She had not looked at Jeremy's bed, but she knew that he was not breathing.

She waited on the landing, listening for the servants' alarm clock. The moment she heard it begin to ring she slipped back into the bedroom and into bed, with her back to Jeremy's bed. The room smelled horribly of gas, and she kept her head under the bedclothes. She knew that she was risking her own life. The gas was still flowing into the stove. If it was going up the flue, she would live. If it was coming into the room she might die. There would be a full hour before Mildred came with the tea.

Her calculations were wrong on two points. First, that she underestimated the effect of the remaining gas, which first produced nausea and then unconsciousness. Secondly, she ignored the escape of gas when she had opened the door. The staff smelled it on the way downstairs. But it was twenty-five minutes to eight before they had located the escape.

Elsie came to consciousness in the

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bed in the spare room with a doctor in attendance — which is to say that, at this stage, she was remarkably lucky.

The preliminary questioning by the police had been simple enough. Elsie was saved from nervous anxiety by her profound ignorance of the resources of the law. Her defense rested, as it were, on a simple formula: "I shall tell everything, except that I left the room — and let 'em get on with it."

Nevertheless, the formula did not save her from a grilling in the Coroner's court. She recognized the Coroner as one of Jeremy's friends, first seen at an early dinner party, who had "dropped off." He asked her one or two unimportant questions, rather starchily, she thought. But it was the police solicitor who questioned her for nearly an hour, coming uncomfortably near the truth.

He had been instructed that there were no fingerprints of any kind on the main tap in the kitchen quarters; on the tap of the stove was a single impression made by the housemaid who had turned it off when she entered the bedroom, at seven thirty-five. There were other, unwritten instructions, delivered with a nod if not a wink, inspired by local gossip.

The solicitor puzzled Elsie by taking her through her own movements for the whole of the preceding day.

"After breakfast my husband left for the office as usual. I read the papers a bit, and then went shopping."

Details were demanded to the shops visited and even of her purchases. Elsie was irritated, but not in the least alarmed.

"This shopping expedition took two hours and ten minutes. Did you require all that time to purchase a few groceries and three pairs of stockings?"

"I don't know — I don't look at my watch that often." She raised her wrist, glanced at her jeweled watch, shook it and began to wind it. "Besides, I did have morning coffee at Gentall's, and I don't suppose I hurried over it."

"Quite so. You took coffee with a friend, perhaps?"

"No!" She hesitated. "Wait a minute — now I come to think of it, a friend did sit at my table for a few minutes before I left."

"Now that you — come to think of it, Mrs. Grantham, can you tell us whether the friend was a woman — *or a man?*"

"It was a man, as a matter of fact. But I don't see why we should drag his name into all this, especially as it will be in the papers."

The solicitor smiled at the jury with some eloquence. At an inquest there are few rules of evidence beyond those imposed by the sitting Coroner — a legal anomaly which is sometimes exploited by the police, in the interests of justice.

"I will not press you for the name of your — er — friend, Mrs. Grantham. I will ask you only one question about him. Is he an expert — or

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rather, was he at one time an acknowledged expert — in *poison gases?*"

There was a rustling sound in the court. About a third of those present knew that Millard had been a senior gas officer.

"You are going too far, Mr. Tranter," growled the Coroner. "Mrs. Grantham, you need not answer that question."

"I couldn't even if I had to, because I don't know. And anyway, what we talked about was the Fair, which was all he wanted to see me about, knowing I helped my husband with the organization work."

The solicitor harked back to the time schedule, making her account for every moment of her day.

"On returning from the film theatre — at what time did you reach your home?"

"I can tell you exactly. As we came into the hall, my husband said it was too late for us to start doing anything. 'It's ten thirty-one, to be exact,' he said, and suggested we should go straight to bed."

"And did you?"

"Yes. That is, I went straight upstairs and he followed a minute or two later."

"That point has already been established," interposed the Coroner. "The housemaid testified that she was awake and heard them both go up, as witness describes."

"True, sir. That witness also told us that deceased was in the habit of turning off the gas at the main before going to bed." He spoke directly to Elsie. "Before following you upstairs, did your husband turn off the gas at the main?"

"As I was upstairs at the time, I don't know what he did."

"By ten thirty-five you were both in your bedroom?" As Elsie assented: "Between ten thirty-five that night and seven thirty-five the following morning, when you were found in a state of light coma, did you leave that bedroom, Mrs. Grantham? — for any purpose whatever?"

"No," said Elsie, in satisfaction of the formula.

"If you did not leave that room for any purpose whatever, does it not strike you as remarkable that you yourself have survived to — er — tell the tale?"

Elsie looked at the Coroner.

"I don't understand what he's asking me."

"I will simplify my question. Here are two persons lying within a few feet of each other in a gas-filled room. Medical evidence establishes that one of them is killed by the gas approximately three hours before seven thirty-five. The other person — yourself, Mrs. Grantham — is only slightly affected and recovers in a few minutes. Can you offer any explanation of that quite astounding circumstance?"

"No, I can't," said Elsie and — with a wisdom which we must assume to have been intuitive — left it at that.

"I have only one more question, Mrs. Grantham. Did your husband ever speak to you of suicide?"

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The Coroner disallowed the question. But everyone in court understood that the solicitor was groping for a suicide pact in which Elsie was the lucky survivor. After Elsie had returned to London the theory was a popular one in Benchester.

The police, on the whole, preferred the theory that an obstruction had been placed in the flue of the gas stove and removed in time. They did not know that Elsie was prudently wearing the "obstruction," while she was giving evidence, but they did know that they had not discovered a tittle of evidence against her.

Notwithstanding the verdict of death by misadventure, Benchester, of course, became too hot to hold Elsie; so she lost no time in returning to London.

In a comfortable little flat in Bloomsbury she was able to face the future without misgiving. The experiment to which she had been subjected, cruel though it might have been, was at least thorough and, by its own standard, sincere. She was sole beneficiary, except for small legacies to the servants. When probate was granted she would step into a yearly income from a trust fund of some twelve hundred pounds. In the meantime, her solicitors had provided her with cash in anticipation of the sale of the house, which was also an item of her inheritance.

In short, the life of well-fed indolence was assured. There was no hitch anywhere. In time, the first half-yearly instalment of her annuity was paid, and there was still some loose change from the sale of the house. She was not even debarred from a second marriage. Not that matrimony now had any charm for her. For many years — she was not yet thirty — she would be able to pick and choose at whim.

Two happy years passed, undisturbed, when Benchester crept into her favorite picture paper. *Benchester Fair Scandals*, she read, *Millard Files Petition: S. Yard Represented.* She skimmed a few lines, with little understanding. She remembered Jeremy's note: *Financially very insecure.* Oh, well, it couldn't matter now. The picture of a bathing belle diverted her attention.

In fact, she was forgetting Benchester and erroneously supposed that Benchester was forgetting her. She had given the quiet little town the only sensation it had enjoyed for a couple of generations. The suicide-pact theory, based on the incalculable effects of draught, still held pride of place; next to it in popularity was the suspicion that Elsie might have hit on some slick little trick for outmaneuvering the police. True, too, that her name was often coupled with that of Millard, though no one suggested that he had been privy to the murder, if murder there had been. That he had once been a gas officer was dismissed as irrelevant.

Such seeming irrelevancies, however, were the stock-in-trade of the

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Department of Dead Ends. To Detective-Inspector Rason had drifted the papers resulting from an unsuccessful attempt to uncover a series of small illicit transactions in Bearer Bonds. The name of Millard had appeared frequently, but always at a safe distance.

In the dossier was a letter, dated May 25th, 1934, from a fellow townsman of Millard's — one Jeremy Grantham — enclosing correspondence with Millard to which the writer invited the attention of the Yard. The evidence, however, had proved insufficient.

Since Millard had been elected to the committee of the Benchester Fair, he had broadened his operations. He was doing nicely with one or two land investment schemes of his own when a bungled attempt to extract a profit from the Fair brought down his house of cards. Rason began by turning up his personal record, where he learned that Millard had served in the Army as a senior gas officer.

Millard — Benchester — Grantham. Presently, he remembered the Grantham case, which he knew from the newspaper accounts only, as Scotland Yard had never been called in. The memory betrayed Rason into perpetrating one of his over-facile juxtapositions.

"Grantham warns us that Millard is a crook. Grantham dies of gas poisoning. Millard is a poison-gas expert."

Rason cheered himself up. If it so happened that Millard had gassed Grantham, all that headachey stuff about bonds and company flotations could be bypassed.

In Benchester he soon picked up the main lines of local gossip. The suggestion that Millard and Mrs. Grantham had been lovers he dismissed as wishful thinking. On the third day a passing remark by the potman of the hotel set him galloping.

"Millard ought never to have got on to the Fair committee," said the potman. "That was poor old Jeremy Grantham's fault, for supporting him. Thought Millard was one of the best, did Grantham."

But Grantham, Rason knew, had not thought Millard one of the best. Grantham would certainly not have supported the candidature. He went in search of the secretary of the Fair, who was not at home. While he was waiting, he took shelter from the rain in the public library, where he entertained himself by studying the file of the local paper — in particular, the inquest on Jeremy Grantham. It was sufficiently clear from the account that it was Millard who had sat at Mrs. Grantham's table for morning coffee.

. . . what we talked about was the Fair, which was all he wanted to see me about, knowing I helped my husband with the organization work.

Rason put two and two together, producing, as not infrequently happened, a total running into three figures.

"So she was his girl friend after all! He talks to her about the Fair —

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gives her some expert counter-dope to protect her against the gas — and she helps with the organization so's he'll be on the committee. I'm going to sit on that secretary's doorstep even if it is raining."

"And if the girl says her boy friend did *not* happen to turn on the gas as far as she knows," said Chief-Inspector Karslake on the way to Elsie's flat, "we say we're sorry and it's only red tape. And if she says he wasn't her boy friend, and she never wangled him on the committee —"

"But she did!" cut in Rason. "We can prove her handwriting in that Report Book. *Recommended*, she wrote. And if you remember, sir, I told you this was only a try-out —"

"Try-*on*, more like!" snorted Karslake. "That's what the girl will say when she kicks us out."

But Elsie did not say anything so rude. She was amiable and communicative, because she was indifferent to Millard's misfortunes, wishing him neither good nor ill.

"It seems Millard wasn't content with taking a hand-out for special pitches at the Fair," explained Rason. "He used his standing as a committee man to influence investment — where he oughtn't to be given any influence, if you understand me. And my superior officer wants to know why you, Mrs. Grantham, wangled him on to the committee."

"Me!" echoed Elsie, in genuine forgetfulness. "How could I wangle anybody anywhere in that hole of a town!"

Rason produced the Report Book, turned the pages, then set it before her.

"That word *Recommended* — alongside Millard's name, there — it's your handwriting, isn't it — same as a lot of other entries?"

"Oh, so there's going to be bother about that, is there?" pouted Elsie.

"Did you make that entry on your husband's instructions?"

Elsie spotted it as one of those sneaky questions to which the questioner knows the answer.

"No, I did it on my own," she said resignedly. "Now I've started, I'd better go on. That book used to come to us once a year to be filled in from the notes and correspondence which was kept in our morning room — took up the whole desk. It was a long job, and I used to make the entries, only bothering my husband when I got stuck. He had made a note earlier in the year approving of Millard for the committee. That note was struck out and my husband had put in another: *Objection: Financially very insecure.* I didn't know it meant Millard was going to turn out to be a crook, and I thought it mean to blot him out because he might be hard up later on, so I wrote *Recommended*. And Millard didn't know what I'd done. He wasn't a special friend of mine, even if you think he was."

Karslake stood up and cleared his throat.

"That was a very wrong action of yours, Mrs. Grantham." He glared at Rason and moved towards the door.

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"But it is a satisfactory answer to our question."

"Yes!" ejaculated Rason. "And let's have a satisfactory answer to this one, too! Putting a man on the committee when your husband had turned him down! How could you hope to get away with that — *if your husband had lived another month?*"

"I didn't look at it like that!" For the first time Elsie scented the danger which, in two years, she had almost forgotten.

"When did you make that entry — and all the other entries — in this book?"

"I don't remember the exact date —"

"Nor do I!" confessed Rason. He opened his attaché case and began to fumble. "Ah, here we are! Statement by Bewley, salaried clerk to the committee. 'I delivered the Report Book at Mr. Grantham's house at eight fifteen, pip emma, on the night of June the first.' That was when you were at the movies with your husband, if I've got it right. And when you came in, you both went straight up to bed and you didn't leave the bedroom until you were carried out next morning."

"What about it!" demanded Elsie. "I must have done the book — oh — oh, any time before I left Benchester!"

"Must have, eh!" Rason flourished the statement signed by Bewley. "At nine o'clock on the morning of June the second — remember? — Bewley called and asked the housemaid if she could get him this book back without causing disturbance at such a time. The disturbance meaning that Grantham had been found dead, and you prostrated with shock, the housemaid told Bewley. She found the Report Book in the morning room and gave it to him. Bewley reckoned it must have taken five hours or more to make all those entries. *When did you put in that five hours' work, Mrs. Grantham?*"

Elsie made no answer. Again there floated in her mind's eye the day of her mother's funeral. That was a respectable funeral. With relations and neighbors at the graveside. . . .

Did you —

GET HIM OUT OF THIS?

(*Solution to puzzle on inside front cover*)

Snip Carton, working out the answer at incredible speed, threw himself flat between the wheels of Spanish Juan's car, so that it passed over him. Dashing off to freedom, he left Black Mark driving at breakneck speed into Spanish Juan's gang, and the landslide wiping out the lot of them.

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Stephen Leacock, Canadian humorist and economist, often called the most popular humorist in America since Mark Twain, wrote his own editorial introduction to the short short-short story that follows: "Among the latest follies in fiction is the perpetual demand for stories shorter and shorter still. The only thing to do is to meet this demand at the source and check it. [The story below], if left to soak overnight in a barrel of rainwater, will swell to the dimensions of a dollar-fifty novel."

AN IRREDUCIBLE DETECTIVE STORY;

or, Hanged by a Hair; or, A Murder Mystery Minimized

by STEPHEN LEACOCK

THE MYSTERY HAD NOW REACHED its climax. First, the man had been undoubtedly murdered. Secondly, it was absolutely certain that no conceivable person had done it.

It was therefore time to call in the great detective.

He gave one searching glance at the corpse. In a moment he whipped out a microscope.

"Ha! ha!" he said, as he picked a hair off the lapel of the dead man's coat. "The mystery is now solved."

He held up the hair.

"Listen," he said, "we have only to find the man who lost this hair and the criminal is in our hands."

The chain of logic was complete.

The detective set himself to the search.

For four days and nights he moved, unobserved, through the streets of New York, scanning closely every face he passed, looking for a man who had lost a hair.

On the fifth day he discovered a man, disguised as a tourist, his head enveloped in a steamer cap that reached below his ears.

The man was about to go on board the *Gloritania*.

The detective followed him on board.

"Arrest him!" he said, and then drawing himself to his full height, he brandished aloft the hair.

"This is his," said the great detective. "It proves his guilt."

"Remove his hat," said the ship's captain sternly.

They did so.

The man was entirely bald.

"Ha!" said the great detective, without a moment of hesitation. "He has committed *not one* murder — *but about a million!*"

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In September 1941 there appeared in the field of criminological criticism a truly monumental work — Howard Haycraft's MURDER FOR PLEASURE: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE DETECTIVE STORY *— the first full-length history of the genre by an American, and still the most outstanding work of its kind ever written. Everybody connected with the detective story — writers, reviewers, and God bless them, readers — went wild about Mr. Haycraft's remarkable book, and pre-publication copies brought forth a flood of enthusiastic testimonials from such connoisseurs as Vincent Starrett, Rex Stout, Erle Stanley Gardner, and the late William Lyon Phelps, and from that beldame of bloodhounding, the late Carolyn Wells (herself a pioneer historian). Your Editors went on record at the time with the following words: "We were so completely fascinated by Mr. Haycraft's* MURDER FOR PLEASURE *that we read clear through in one sitting; it is a landmark in the history of detective fiction — a brilliant, necessary, long-overdue study, written with charm and authority." Happily, the book is still in print, and available from its publishers, Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 35 West 32nd Street, New York 1, New York; retail price: $3.50.*

On pages 302–306 of MURDER FOR PLEASURE, *Mr. Haycraft offered what he called "A Readers' List of Detective Story 'Cornerstones'" — the carefully considered highspots published in the United States, Great Britain, and France, from 1845 through 1938. Although it is hard to believe, a full decade has passed since* MURDER FOR PLEASURE *first appeared. So, to help celebrate EQMM's Tenth Anniversary Issue, we asked Mr. Haycraft to go over his notes covering detective stories published between 1938 and 1948, and to select those cornerstones which he thinks should be added to his original list. Further comments at the end of Mr. Haycraft's important critical contribution . . .*

NOTES ON ADDITIONS TO A CORNERSTONE LIBRARY

by HOWARD HAYCRAFT

Of the several events which marked the Centennial of the Detective Story in 1941, two occurred in the same month. One was the first issue of *EQMM*. The other was the publication of the present writer's MURDER FOR PLEASURE: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE DETECTIVE STORY, in one of the chapters of which, entitled *A Detective Story Bookshelf*,

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I presumed to name some sixty-four writers from Edgar Allan Poe to Mabel Seeley whose first or chief works might constitute the cornerstones of an amateur collector's library. Though the book itself was published in 1941, the latest cornerstone carried the date 1938 — for, I think, fairly obvious reasons of necessary perspective.

It was Ellery Queen's happy idea, which I gladly welcomed, that I should utilize this 10th anniversary issue of *EQMM* as an appropriate forum to bring the cornerstone-list down to date.

Not until I began to review my notes did I fully realize (as no doubt I should have done before) the exceptional difficulties of assembling a definitive list for a decade which witnessed a numerical outpouring unequaled in the history of the form, together with a process of literary osmosis that all but obliterated the old limitations and demarcations. In terms of sheer numbers, between 2,000 and 2,500 detective-mystery-crime titles were published in the United States alone during the period under scrutiny — or more than the entire output of the detective story in its first seventy-five years of existence.

In short, the detective-mystery-crime story (for such is its multiform nature today, and we may as well face it) has come of age, and in the process has left behind it the era of sharply defined frontiers and towering historical landmarks. What the years under consideration *have* produced is some excellent and often polished entertainment, but of a type which in my opinion will require a longer perspective before more than a few of its lasting contributions can be named with any degree of certainty. To spot the pioneers of any movement, literary or otherwise, is comparatively easy (especially in retrospect); but to recognize those members of the succeeding generation most-likely-to-endure is something else again, and needs, I submit, more time.

Enough of this preamble. It should be apparent by now that the present essay will not be the crisp and declarative list of titles for the years between 1938 and 1948 that Ellery Queen and I first envisioned, but rather some preliminary notes pointing to such an eventual end. And which, I hope, may in the meantime suggest a few paths of joy to collectors and readers.

Concerning a few — but only a few — of the new authors and their works of the decennium there can be little doubt. I am certain, for example, that the earlier Philip Marlowe novels of Raymond Chandler ("in and beyond the Hammett tradition," James Sandoe has called them) belong in

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the charmed circle; though more for their colorful imagery and less for their publicized social content than their author would (and does) contend. As for the representative work, I would leave an open choice between the first and second novels, THE BIG SLEEP (1939) and FAREWELL, MY LOVELY (1940).

Then there are the Lockridges, the creators of that civilized and perennially delightful duo, Mr. and Mrs. North. Today it has become a little the fashion to blame the sins of a host of "wacky" imitators on the Norths. What we are likely to forget, ungratefully, is the fact that the Lockridge novels are among the few domestic productions in which style plays a major part in our enjoyment. Hard-pressed to pick any single title, I would fall back on the curtain-raising tale, THE NORTHS MEET MURDER (1940).

The chief question concerning Dorothy B. Hughes is whether to name her first extravagant but unforgettable study-in-terror THE SO BLUE MARBLE (1940), or such an example of her maturer talent as IN A LONELY PLACE (1947). Cornell Woolrich, at his best a master of sensation fiction almost unrivaled in our day, presents a similar problem of selection; personally, I would choose PHANTOM LADY (1942), published under his pen-name, William Irish. I have a few more reservations about Craig Rice — in the long perspective — but as outstanding examples of typically American humor-cum-detection such of her novels as TRIAL BY FURY (1941), featuring the Justus-Malone team, or HOME SWEET HOMICIDE (1944) win at least conditional consideration.

Fewer than one could wish, Hilda Lawrence's stories have made a major contribution, by shrewd and sensitive writing, toward lifting the American-feminine mystery from its self-induced doldrums; I would choose her BLOOD UPON THE SNOW (1944), introducing Mark East. And though it has had no successor in five years, Helen Eustis's THE HORIZONTAL MAN (1946) is sure of a place on my own shelf as a novel which gave me as much personal enjoyment as any single performance of the decade.

All the authors mentioned to this point have been Americans. The reasons why British newcomers during the period were numerically scarce should be obvious to anyone not wilfully myopic. Nevertheless, a few names and titles stand out. High among them I place Raymond Postgate's ironically compassionate trial story, VERDICT OF TWELVE (1940). Not far behind belongs another modern courtroom classic, Edgar Lustgarten's moving ONE MORE UNFORTUNATE (1947). Space must be found, too, for Josephine Tey's

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THE FRANCHISE AFFAIR (1948), a brilliant variation in modern dress on the Elizabeth Canning legend. In the realm of more orthodox detection — once almost the monopoly of our cousins across the sea — it seems to me that Edmund Crispin among the newer writers has best demonstrated the necessary staying-power (though he has grown disturbingly prolix of late). While many devotees of Michael Innes and John Dickson Carr plump for Crispin's THE MOVING TOYSHOP (1946), my own preference is for his less ebullient, better disciplined LOVE LIES BLEEDING (1948).

In a decade dominated by Mars, the spy story inevitably flourished, and with a generally closer relationship to the detective pattern than in previous years. If I were permitted but one author in this category, my vote would go without hesitation to Manning Coles and the two first, inseparable, and incomparable Tommy Hambledon adventures, DRINK TO YESTERDAY and A TOAST TO TOMORROW, both published in the United States in 1941. (Query: why doesn't some enterprising publisher reissue them in a two-in-one volume and earn the gratitude of a new generation of readers?)

Though by definition the discussion thus far has confined itself to new writers, such a distinction would be meaningless in the field of the anthology. Here I think we must reverse the rule and look solely at the works themselves. Imagining again the necessity of a single choice, I would commend to the reader and collector Ellery Queen's centennial 101 YEARS' ENTERTAINMENT (1941), as the decade's contribution certain to stand beside the great pioneer anthologies of Dorothy L. Sayers, Willard Huntington Wright (S. S. Van Dine), and E. M. Wrong on the "definitive" shelf.

Do the foregoing nominations omit large numbers of your favorite mystery writers who blossomed during the decade? They do of mine, too. Authors whose distinction rests less on individual titles than on solid and consistent craftsmanship over many years and books — authors whom the "longer perspective" may well admit to the inner circle in time to come — authors of the stature and accomplishments of, say, Arthur W. Upfield, Elizabeth Daly, A. A. Fair, Cyril Hare, Roger Bax, Charlotte Armstrong, H. C. Branson, to mention only a random handful by way of illustration.

Concerning one deliberate and categorical omission, I want to say a further word. Much as I approve the broadened scope of the modern detective-crime-mystery story, and with no wish to insist on narrow definitions, I am nevertheless unable to go along with some of my colleagues who would claim for the canon virtually every author who has ever touched on crime

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or violence. I am sufficiently old-fashioned to believe that there is still a distinction of some importance between fiction written for the mystery audience, and psychological novels and character studies which chance to employ crime as a catalyst. For this reason I have purposely not named such essentially non-mystery writers (to my mind) as Graham Greene, James M. Cain, C. S. Forester, and W. R. Burnett — though I am well aware that a case can be made for their inclusion.

If ever they *are* included, if the day arrives when the bars are lowered, then I reserve the right to head my own list of Fringe Benefits with Daphne Du Maurier's REBECCA (1938), one of the finest mystery stories of all time although it was not written as one.

Here endeth the First Decennial Detective Digest. God willing, I'll see you again in 1961 with another batch of notes. Until then: good reading — and good hunting!

POSTSCRIPT BY ELLERY QUEEN

. . . and now we give you a master-list of all the cornerstones selected by Howard Haycraft, America's foremost historian of the detective story — his original choices covering the period between 1845 and 1938, and the cornerstones he has just recommended from the decade of 1939–1948. In addition, Mr. Haycraft has graciously permitted your Editors to express their own critical judgment, by letting us insert and append those titles which we feel belong in a definitive and historical library of detective-crime-mystery fiction.

Please note that all the titles suggested by Ellery Queen are identified by an asterisk (*), and that all the comments shown in small italic type were written by Queen, and therefore do not necessarily reflect Mr. Haycraft's opinions. As you will see, Queen takes a broader critical view of the mystery field than many of our colleagues; perhaps this is the inevitable result of our striving, twelve times every year, to make each issue of EQMM as diversified as possible. In any event, we beg you not to be disturbed by any differences of opinion, implied or overt, which may exist between Mr. Haycraft and ourselves: without a single exception, the differences of opinion are completely honest ones, and honest differences of opinion are not so much the cause of dissension as the basis of true comprehension.

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The Haycraft-Queen Definitive Library of Detective-Crime-Mystery Fiction

TWO CENTURIES OF CORNERSTONES, 1748-1948

1748 Voltaire — *ZADIG
The Great-Grandfather of the Detective Story

1828-9 François Eugène Vidocq — *MÉMOIRES DE VIDOCQ
The Grandfather of the Detective Story

1845 Edgar Allan Poe — TALES
The Father of the Detective Story

1852-3 Charles Dickens — BLEAK HOUSE
THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD, *1870*

1856 "Waters" (William Russell) — *RECOLLECTIONS OF A DETECTIVE POLICE-OFFICER
The first English detective yellow-back

1860 Wilkie Collins — *THE WOMAN IN WHITE

1862 Victor Hugo — *LES MISÉRABLES (First edition in English, also *1862*)

1866 Feodor Dostoevsky — *CRIME AND PUNISHMENT (First edition in English, *1886*)

1866 Émile Gaboriau — L'AFFAIRE LEROUGE
*LE DOSSIER N° 113, *1867*
*LE CRIME D'ORCIVAL, *1868*
MONSIEUR LECOQ, *1869*
The Father of the Detective Novel

1868 Wilkie Collins — THE MOONSTONE
The Father of the English Detective Novel

1872 (Harlan Page Halsey) — *OLD SLEUTH, THE DETECTIVE, *1885*
The first Dime Novel detective story

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1874	Allan Pinkerton	*The Expressman and the Detective
1878	Anna Katharine Green	The Leavenworth Case

The Mother of the American Detective Novel

1882	Robert Louis Stevenson	*New Arabian Nights *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, *1886*

Was it Maurice Richardson who said of this book that it is the only detective-crime story he knows in which the solution is more terrifying than the problem?

1887	Fergus W. Hume	*The Mystery of a Hansom Cab

An historically important book

1887	A. Conan Doyle	A Study in Scarlet The Sign of Four, *1890* The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, *1892* The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes, *1894* The Hound of the Baskervilles, *1902* The Return of Sherlock Holmes, *1905* The Valley of Fear, *1915* His Last Bow, *1917* The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes, *1927*

The listing of all the Sherlock Holmes books — the complete works — is sheer idolatry. Surely the first Holmes story, A STUDY IN SCARLET, *is an undeniable cornerstone; also* THE ADVENTURES *and* THE MEMOIRS; *and the best of the novels should also be present in any definitive detective library. Most critics would probably select* THE HOUND *as the best novel; John Dickson Carr's choice is* THE VALLEY OF FEAR.

1892	Israel Zangwill	The Big Bow Mystery
1894	Mark Twain	*The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson
1894	Arthur Morrison	Martin Hewitt, Investigator
1895	M. P. Shiel	*Prince Zaleski

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1897	Bram Stoker	*Dracula
		A mystery classic — interpreting "mystery" in its broadest sense
1899	E. W. Hornung	*The Amateur Cracksman
		The first Raffles book — "detection in reverse"
1903	(Erskine Childers)	*The Riddle of the Sands
		Recommended by Christopher Morley as the classic secret service novel
1906	Godfrey R. Benson	Tracks in the Snow
1906	Robert Barr	The Triumphs of Eugène Valmont
1907	Jacques Futrelle	The Thinking Machine
1907	Maurice Leblanc	*Arsène Lupin, Gentleman-Cambrioleur *"813", *1910*
		The Leblanc-Lupin masterpiece
		Les Huits Coups de L'Horloge, *1922*
1907	Gaston Leroux	Le Mystère de la Chambre Jaune *Le Parfum de la Dame en Noir, *1908–9*
1907	R. Austin Freeman	The Red Thumb Mark
		The first Dr. Thorndyke book
		*John Thorndyke's Cases, *1909* *The Eye of Osiris, *1911* The Singing Bone, *1912*
		The first "inverted" detective stories
1908	Mary Roberts Rinehart	The Circular Staircase
		The founding of the Had-I-But-Known school
1908	O. Henry	*The Gentle Grafter
1908	G. K. Chesterton	*The Man Who Was Thursday The Innocence of Father Brown, *1911*

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1909 Cleveland Moffett *THROUGH THE WALL
A neglected highspot

1909 Baroness Orczy THE OLD MAN IN THE CORNER

1909 Carolyn Wells THE CLUE
The first Fleming Stone book

1910 A. E. W. Mason AT THE VILLA ROSE
The first Hanaud book
THE HOUSE OF THE ARROW, *1924*

1910 William MacHarg and Edwin Balmer *THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF LUTHER TRANT
The first book of short stories to make scientific use of psychology as a method of crime detection

1912 Arthur B. Reeve THE SILENT BULLET
The first Craig Kennedy book

1913 Mrs. Belloc Lowndes THE LODGER
One of the earliest "suspense" stories

1913 Sax Rohmer *THE MYSTERY OF DR FU-MANCHU

1913 E. C. Bentley TRENT'S LAST CASE (First U. S. title: THE WOMAN IN BLACK)
The birth of naturalism in characterization

1914 Ernest Bramah MAX CARRADOS
The first blind detective

1914 Louis Joseph Vance *THE LONE WOLF

1915 John Buchan *THE THIRTY-NINE STEPS

1916 Thomas Burke *LIMEHOUSE NIGHTS

1918 Melville Davisson Post UNCLE ABNER

1918 J. S. Fletcher THE MIDDLE TEMPLE MURDER

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1920	Agatha Christie	*The Mysterious Affair at Styles
		The first Hercule Poirot book
		The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, *1926*
1920	Freeman Wills Crofts	The Cask
		Inspector French's Greatest Case, *1924*
1920	H. C. Bailey	Call Mr. Fortune
		The Red Castle, *1932*
1920	"Sapper" (Cyril McNeile)	*Bull-Dog Drummond
1920	Arthur Train	*Tutt and Mr. Tutt
1921	Eden Phillpotts	The Grey Room
1922	A. A. Milne	The Red House Mystery
1923	G. D. H. Cole	The Brooklyn Murders
1923	Dorothy L. Sayers	*Whose Body?
		The first Lord Peter Wimsey book
		The Nine Tailors, *1934*
	—— and Robert Eustace	The Documents in the Case, *1930*
1924	Philip MacDonald	The Rasp
		The first Colonel Anthony Gethryn book
		*Warrant for X, *1938* (English title: The Nursemaid who Disappeared, *1938*)
1925	Edgar Wallace	The Mind of Mr. J. G. Reeder
1925	John Rhode	The Paddington Mystery
		The first Dr. Priestley book
		*The Murders in Praed Street, *1928*
1925	Earl Derr Biggers	The House without a Key
		The first Charlie Chan book

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1925	Theodore Dreiser	*An American Tragedy
1925	Liam O'Flaherty	*The Informer
1925	Ronald A. Knox	The Viaduct Murder
1926	S. S. Van Dine	The Benson Murder Case *or*
	The first Philo Vance book	The "Canary" Murder Case, *1927*
1926	C. S. Forester	*Payment Deferred
1927	Frances Noyes Hart	The Bellamy Trial
1928	W. Somerset Maugham	*Ashenden
1929	Anthony Berkeley	The Poisoned Chocolates Case
		*Trial and Error, *1937*
	[Francis Iles]	Before the Fact, *1932*
1929	Ellery Queen	The Roman Hat Mystery
	The first Ellery Queen book	*Calamity Town, *1942*
	[Barnaby Ross]	The Tragedy of X, *1932*
	The first Drury Lane book	*The Tragedy of Y, *1932*
1929	Rufus King	*Murder by the Clock
	The first Lieutenant Valcour book	
1929	W. R. Burnett	*Little Caesar
1929	T. S. Stribling	*Clues of the Caribbees
	The only Professor Poggioli book	
1929	Harvey J. O'Higgins	*Detective Duff Unravels It
	The first psychoanalyst detective	
1929	Mignon G. Eberhart	The Patient in Room 18
1930	Frederick Irving Anderson	Book of Murder

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1930	Dashiell Hammett	THE MALTESE FALCON
	The first Sam Spade book	
		*THE GLASS KEY, *1931*
		*THE ADVENTURES OF SAM SPADE, *1944*
1930	David Frome	THE HAMMERSMITH MURDERS
	The first Mr. Pinkerton book	
1931	Stuart Palmer	*THE PENGUIN POOL MURDER
	The first Hildegarde Withers book	
1931	Francis Beeding	*DEATH WALKS IN EASTREPPS
	Vincent Starrett considers this book "one of the ten greatest detective novels."	
1931	Glen Trevor (James Hilton)	*MURDER AT SCHOOL (U. S. title: WAS IT MURDER?, *1933*)
1931	Damon Runyon	*GUYS AND DOLLS
1931	Phoebe Atwood Taylor	THE CAPE COD MYSTERY
	The first Asey Mayo book	
1932	R. A. J. Walling	THE FATAL FIVE MINUTES
1932	Clemence Dane and Helen Simpson	RE-ENTER SIR JOHN
1933	Erle Stanley Gardner	*THE CASE OF THE VELVET CLAWS
	The first Perry Mason book	
		THE CASE OF THE SULKY GIRL, *1933*
1934	Margery Allingham	DEATH OF A GHOST
1934	James M. Cain	*THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE
1934	Rex Stout	FER-DE-LANCE
	The first Nero Wolfe book	
		*THE LEAGUE OF FRIGHTENED MEN, *1935*
1935	Richard Hull	THE MURDER OF MY AUNT

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1935	John P. Marquand	*No Hero
		The first Mr. Moto book
1938	John Dickson Carr [Carter Dickson]	The Crooked Hinge
		The Judas Window, *1938*
		*The Curse of the Bronze Lamp, *1945* (English title: Lord of the Sorcerers, *1946*)

In his original list, Mr. Haycraft chose The Arabian Nights Murder *by Carr and* The Plague Court Murders *by Dickson; but on page 493 of his* The Art of the Mystery Story *Mr. Haycraft wrote: "After careful, and possibly maturer, re-reading I beg to change my vote" to* The Crooked Hinge *and* The Judas Window

1938	Nicholas Blake	The Beast Must Die
1938	Michael Innes	Lament for a Maker
1938	Clayton Rawson	*Death from a Top Hat
		The first Great Merlini book
1938	Graham Greene	*Brighton Rock
1938	Daphne Du Maurier	*Rebecca
1938	Mabel Seeley	The Listening House
1939	Ngaio Marsh	Overture to Death
1939	Eric Ambler	A Coffin for Dimitrios (English title: The Mask of Dimitrios)
1939	Raymond Chandler	The Big Sleep *or*
		The first Philip Marlowe book
		Farewell, My Lovely, *1940*
1939	Georges Simenon	The Patience of Maigret
1940	Raymond Postgate	Verdict of Twelve

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1940	Frances and Richard Lockridge	THE NORTHS MEET MURDER
1940	Dorothy B. Hughes	THE SO BLUE MARBLE *or* IN A LONELY PLACE, *1947*
1940	Cornell Woolrich [William Irish]	*THE BRIDE WORE BLACK PHANTOM LADY, *1942*
1940	Manning Coles	DRINK TO YESTERDAY A TOAST TO TOMORROW, *1941* (English title: PRAY SILENCE, *1940*)

The first two Tommy Hambledon books

1941	H. F. Heard	*A TASTE FOR HONEY
1941	Craig Rice	TRIAL BY FURY *or* HOME SWEET HOMICIDE, *1944*
1942	H. H. Holmes (Anthony Boucher)	*ROCKET TO THE MORGUE
1942	James Gould Cozzens	*THE JUST AND THE UNJUST
1944	Hilda Lawrence	BLOOD UPON THE SNOW
1946	Helen Eustis	THE HORIZONTAL MAN
1946	Charlotte Armstrong	*THE UNSUSPECTED
1946	Lillian de la Torre	*DR. SAM: JOHNSON, DETECTOR
1946	Edmund Crispin	THE MOVING TOYSHOP *or* LOVE LIES BLEEDING, *1948*
1947	Edgar Lustgarten	ONE MORE UNFORTUNATE (English title: A CASE TO ANSWER)
1947	Roy Vickers	*THE DEPARTMENT OF DEAD ENDS
1948	Josephine Tey	THE FRANCHISE AFFAIR
1948	William Faulkner	*INTRUDER IN THE DUST

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ORIGIN OF THE DETECTIVE BUSINESS

by NEWTON NEWKIRK

ADAM WAS THE FIRST DETECTIVE WHO ever happened. One day he woke up with a pain in his side.

"Gee-whizz," he exclaimed, "somebody has swiped one of my ribs." (*the first theft*)

"Here it is," said a sweet voice behind him. (*the first clue*)

Adam turned swiftly and beheld a beautiful woman. (*the first "woman in the case"*)

"Yuh-yuh-yes," gasped Adam, "there it is, but whatizzit?" (*the first mystery*)

"Why, I am your missing rib," replied the woman. (*the first confession*)

"Absurd," retorted Adam. "What is your name?" (*the first instance of cross-examination*)

"I am Eve," said the woman.

"Huh," snorted Adam, "you look more like 'September Morn'." (*the first case of "mistaken identity"*)

Thereupon Eve blushed and excused herself. A few minutes later she returned wearing a modern fig-leaf costume — the waist had a plunging neckline and the skirt was slashed. (*the first disguise*)

Later Eve handed Adam what she called an apple. (*the first trap*)

After Adam bit into it he found it to be a *LEMON*. (*the first doublecross*)

Right there is where the Serpent concealed in the tree overhead broke forth in a suppressed chuckle of mirth. (*the first detectaphone*)

One evening Adam came home from his daily toil, hungry and tired. He had been plowing on a steep hillside all day behind a refractory dinosaur and was hungrier than a couple of goats.

"I have a surprise for you, Adam," gushed Eve, as she kissed him on the front piazza. "Guess what?"

"Corned megatherium beef and cabbage," exclaimed Adam. (*the first theory*)

"Oh, pshaw, Adam, it isn't anything to eat — it is something the stork left on the front doorstep."

"Ah-ha," hissed Adam. "A girl?"

"No, not a girl," Eve replied; "guess again."

"Aw, shucks," sighed Adam; "I never was any good at guessing."

"Adam, you are the most stupid man I ever saw. Now, think hard — if it isn't a girl, what *must* it be?"

Adam pondered deeply a moment and then in a flash of almost human intelligence he exclaimed, "Ah, I know now — a *BOY!*" (*the first "deduction by elimination"*)

After supper Adam loaded his old shotgun and took his place on the doorstep. (*the first gunman*)

"What are you waiting for?" asked Eve.

"I'm waiting for that stork to come back," snapped Adam. (*the first threat*)

And so it was in the beginning . . .

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Between 1933 and 1935, Dorothy L. Sayers wrote a series of detective-story reviews — "legendary critiques" — for the "Sunday Times" of London. From time to time, we shall bring you excerpts from these reviews — from what Howard Haycraft has called the "pungent and penetrant obiter dicta" *of that great lady.*

For example: Dorothy L. Sayers once made the following observation about Erle Stanley Gardner. "I cannot help it," she wrote, "I always enjoy Mr. Gardner's stories about Perry Mason. All the time I have an uneasy feeling that I ought not to enjoy them: that I have no business to admire a criminal lawyer whose methods are so unorthodox."

We do not know if Miss Sayers has ever read Erle Stanley Gardner's earlier stories about Lester Leith, and if she has, whether (like it or not) she derives equal enjoyment from the larcenous adventures of Mr. Gardner's criminal detective. But we have a strong conviction that if Miss Sayers finds pleasure (however reluctantly) in the Lester Leith stories, it is for the same basic reason that she enjoys Perry Mason; and, further, that she has the same uneasy feeling gnawing at her conscience — that perhaps she ought not to enjoy them because she really has no business admiring a criminal detective whose methods are so unorthodox.

THE EXACT OPPOSITE

by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

THERE WAS A GLINT OF AMUSEMENT in the eyes of Lester Leith as he lazily surveyed the valet, who was in reality no valet at all, but a police undercover operative sent by Sergeant Ackley to spy upon him.

"And so you don't like fanatical East Indian priests, Scuttle?"

"No, sir," he said. "I should hate to have them on *my* trail."

Lester Leith took a cigarette from the humidor and flicked his lighter.

"Scuttle," he said, "why the devil should Indian priests be on anyone's trail?"

"If I were to tell you, sir, you'd think that I was trying to interest you in another crime. As a matter of fact, sir, it *was* a crime which caused me to voice that sentiment about East Indian priests."

"Indeed?" said Lester Leith.

"Yes, sir," he said. "I was thinking about the murder of George Navin."

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Lester Leith looked reproachfully at the spy.

"Scuttle," he said, "is it possible that you are trying to interest me in *that* crime?"

"No, sir, not at all," the spy made haste to reassure him. "Although if you *were* interested in the crime, sir, I am satisfied that this is a case made to order for you."

Lester Leith shook his head.

"No, Scuttle," he said. "Much as I like to dabble in crime problems, I don't care to let myself go on them. You see, Scuttle, it's a mental pastime with me. I like to read newspaper accounts of crimes and speculate on what might be a solution."

"Yes, sir," said the spy. "This is just the sort of a crime that you used to like to speculate about, sir."

Lester Leith sighed. "No, Scuttle," he said. "I really don't dare to do it. You see, Scuttle, Sergeant Ackley learned about that fad of mine, and he insists that I am some sort of a super-criminal who goes about hijacking robbers out of their ill-gotten spoils. There's nothing that I can do to convince the man that he is wrong. Therefore, I have found it necessary to give up my fad."

"Well," said the valet, "of course, sir, Sergeant Ackley doesn't need to know everything that happens in the privacy of your own apartment, sir."

Lester Leith shook his head sadly. "One would think so, Scuttle, and yet Sergeant Ackley seems to have some uncanny knowledge of what I am thinking about."

"Yes, sir," he said. "Have you read anything about the murder of George Navin?"

Lester Leith frowned. "Wasn't he mixed up with some kind of a gem robbery, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir," said the spy eagerly. "He was an explorer, and he had explored extensively in the Indian jungle. Perhaps you've heard something about those jungle temples, sir?"

"What about them, Scuttle?"

"India," the spy said, "is a land of wealth, of gold and rubies. In some of the primitive jungle districts the inhabitants lavish their wealth on idols. Back in a hidden part of the jungle, in a sect known as the Sivaites, there was a huge temple devoted to Vinayaka, the Prince of Evil Spirits, and in that temple was a beautiful ruby, the size of a pigeon egg, set in a gold border which had Sanskrit letters carved in it."

Lester Leith said: "Scuttle, you're arousing my curiosity."

"I'm sorry, sir."

Leith said: "Well, we won't discuss it any more, Scuttle. The way these things go, one thing leads to another, and then — But tell me one thing: is George Navin supposed to have had that gem?"

"Yes, sir. He managed to get it from the temple, although he never admitted it, but in one of his books dealing with some of the peculiar religious sects in India, there's a photographic illustration of this gem — and authorities claim that it would

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have been absolutely impossible to have photographed it in the temple, that Navin must have managed to get possession of the ruby and brought it to this country."

Lester Leith said: "Wasn't that illustration reproduced in one of the newspapers after Navin's death?"

"Yes, sir. I have it here, sir."

The spy reached inside the pocket of his coat and pulled out a clipping.

Leith hesitated, then reluctantly took it. "I shouldn't look at this. But I'm going to, Scuttle. After that, don't tell me any more about it."

"Very well, sir."

Leith looked at the newspaper illustration. "There'd be a better reproduction in Navin's book, Scuttle?"

"Oh, yes, sir — a full-sized photograph."

Leith said: "And, as I gather it, Scuttle, the Hindu priests objected to the spoliation of the temple?"

"Very much, sir. It seems they attached some deep religious significance to the stone. You may remember four or five months ago, shortly after the book was published, there was an attempted robbery of Navin's house. Navin shot a man with a .45 automatic."

"An East Indian?"

"Yes, sir," said the spy. "A Hindu priest of the particular sect which had maintained the jungle temple."

Leith said: "Well, that's enough, Scuttle. I don't want to hear anything more about it. You'd have thought Navin would have taken precautions."

"Oh, but he did, sir. He hired a bodyguard — a chap named Arthur Blaire and a detective, Ed Springer. They were with him all the time."

"Just the three of them in the house?" Lester Leith asked.

"No, sir. There were four. There was a Robert Lamont, a confidential secretary."

"Accompanying Navin on his travels?" Leith asked.

The spy nodded.

"Any servants?" Leith asked.

"Only a housekeeper who came in and worked by the day."

Leith frowned and then said: "Scuttle, don't answer this if it's going to arouse my curiosity any more. But how the devil could a man get murdered if he had two bodyguards and his secretary with him all the time?"

"That, sir, is the thing the police can't understand. Mr. Navin slept in a room which was considered virtually burglar-proof. There were steel shutters on the windows, and a door which locked with a combination, and there was a guard on duty outside of the door all night."

"How did he get ventilation?"

"Through some ventilating system which was installed, and which permitted a circulation of air but wouldn't permit anyone to gain access to the room, sir."

"Don't go on, Scuttle," he said. "I simply mustn't hear about it."

"But, sir," said the spy wheedlingly, "you have heard so much now that it certainly wouldn't hurt to go on and

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have your natural curiosity satisfied."

Lester Leith sighed. "Very well, Scuttle," he said. "What happened?"

The spy spoke rapidly. "Navin went to bed, sir. Blaire and Springer, the bodyguards, made the rounds of the room, making certain that the steel shutters were locked on the inside, and that the windows were closed and locked. That was about ten o'clock at night. About ten forty Bob Lamont, the secretary, received an important telegram which he wanted to take up to Mr. Navin. He had the bodyguards open the door, and call Navin softly to find out if he was asleep. Navin was sitting up in bed reading.

"They were in there for fifteen or twenty minutes. The guards don't know exactly what happened, because they sat outside on guard, but apparently it was, as Lamont says, just an ordinary business conference. Then Lamont came out, and the guards closed the door. About midnight Arthur Blaire retired, and Ed Springer kept the first watch until four o'clock in the morning. At four, Blaire came on and relieved Springer, and at nine o'clock the secretary came in with the morning mail.

"That was part of the custom, sir. The secretary was the first to go into the room with the morning mail, and he discussed it while Mr. Navin tubbed and shaved.

"The guard opened the door, and Lamont went in.

"The guard heard him say, 'Good morning,' to Mr. Navin, and walk across the room to open the shutters. Then suddenly he heard Lamont give an exclamation.

"George Navin had been murdered by having his throat cut. Everything in the room had been ransacked; even the furniture had been taken to pieces."

Lester Leith made no attempt to disguise his interest now.

"What time was the crime committed, Scuttle?" he asked. "The autopsy surgeon could tell that."

"Yes, sir," said the spy. "At approximately four A.M. sir."

"How did the murderer get into the room?" asked Lester Leith.

"There, sir," said the valet, "is where the police are baffled. The windows were all closed, and the shutters were all locked on the inside."

"And the murder was committed at just about the time the guards were being changed, eh?" said Lester Leith.

"Yes, sir," said the valet.

"So that either one of the guards might be suspected, eh, Scuttle?"

The valet said: "As a matter of fact, sir, both of them are under suspicion. But they have excellent references."

"Well," said Lester Leith, "did the murderer get the ruby, Scuttle?"

"Well, sir, the ruby wasn't in that bedroom at all. The ruby was kept in a specially constructed safe which was in a secret hiding place in the house. No one knew of the existence of that safe, with the exception of George Navin and the two body-

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guards. Also, of course, the secretary. Naturally, after discovering the murder, the men went immediately to the safe and opened it. They found that the stone was gone. The police have been unable to find any fingerprints on the safe, but they did discover something else which is rather mystifying.

"The police are satisfied that the murderer entered through one of the windows on the east side of the room. There are tracks in the soft soil of the garden beneath the window, and there are the round marks embedded in the soil where the ends of a bamboo ladder were placed on the ground."

"Bamboo, eh, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir. That, of course, would indicate that the murderers were Indian, sir."

"But," said Lester Leith, "how could they get through a steel shutter locked on the inside, murder a man, get out through a window, close the window, and leave the shutter still locked on the inside?"

"That is the point, sir."

"Then," said Lester Leith, "the bodyguards weren't mixed up in it. If they were mixed up in it, they would have let the murderer come in through the door.

"But," went on Lester Leith, "there is no evidence as to how the murderer could have secured the gem."

"That's quite true, sir."

"What are the police doing?"

"The police are questioning all the men. That is, sir, the servants and the bodyguards. Lamont left the house right after talking with Navin, and went to a secret conference with Navin's attorney, a man by the name of During. During had his stenographer there, a young lady named Edith Skinner, so that Lamont can account for every minute of his time."

"Do I understand that the conference lasted all night?"

"Yes, sir. The conference was very important. It had to do with certain legal matters in connection with income tax and publishing rights."

"But that's such an unusual time for a conference," said Lester Leith.

"Yes, sir," said the valet, "but it couldn't be helped, Mr. Lamont was very busy with Mr. Navin. It seems that Navin was rather a peculiar individual, and he demanded a great deal of attention. As soon as the lawyer said that the examination of the records and things would take a period of over eight hours, Navin made so much trouble that Lamont finally agreed to work all one night."

"What time did Lamont leave the conference?" asked Leith.

"About eight o'clock in the morning. They went down to breakfast, and then Lamont drove out to the house in time to get the morning mail ready for Mr. Navin."

"The police, of course, are coming down pretty hard on Blaire and Springer, eh, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir, because it would have been almost impossible for anyone to have entered that room without the connivance of one of the watchmen. And then again, sir, the fact that the

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murder was timed to take place when the watchmen were changing their shift would seem to indicate that either Blaire was a party to the crime, and fixed the time so that he could put the blame on Springer, or that Springer was the guilty one, and had committed the crime just as soon as he came on duty so that suspicion would attach to Blaire."

"Rather a neat problem, I should say," said Lester Leith. "One that will keep Sergeant Ackley busy."

"Yes, sir," said the valet, "and it just goes to show how ingenious the Hindus are."

"Yes," said Lester Leith dreamily, "it's a very ingenious murder — save for one thing."

The valet's eyes glistened with eagerness.

"What," he asked, "is that one thing, sir?"

"No, no, Scuttle," he said. "If I should tell you, that would be violating the pact which I have made with myself. I have determined that I wouldn't work out any more academic crime solutions."

"I would like very much, sir," said the valet coaxingly, "to know what that one thing is."

Lester Leith took a deep breath.

"No, Scuttle," he said. "Do not tempt me."

Lester Leith reclined in the long chair, his feet crossed on the cushions, his eyes watching the cigarette smoke.

"Do you know, Scuttle," he said, almost dreamily, "I am tempted to conduct an experiment."

"An experiment, sir?"

"Yes," said Lester Leith. "A psychological experiment. It would, however, require certain things. I would want three fifty-dollar bills and fifty one-dollar bills, Scuttle. I would want a diamond tiepin, an imitation of the ruby which was stolen from Navin's house, and a very attractive chorus girl."

Edward H. Beaver, undercover man who was working directly under Sergeant Arthur Ackley, but who was known to Lester Leith as "Scuttle," surveyed the police sergeant across the battered top of the desk at Headquarters.

Sergeant Ackley blinked his crafty eyes at the undercover man and said: "Give me that list again, Beaver."

"Three fifty-dollar bills, fifty one-dollar bills, a large diamond stick-pin, an imitation of the ruby which was stolen, and a chorus girl."

Sergeant Ackley slammed the pencil down.

"He was taking you for a ride," he said.

The undercover man shook his head stubbornly.

"No, he wasn't," he said. "It's just the way he works. Every time he starts on one of his hijacking escapades, he asks for a bunch of stuff that seems so absolutely crazy there's no sense to it. But every time so far those things have all turned out to be part of a carefully laid plan which results in victory for Leith and defeat for the crooks — and for us."

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Sergeant Ackley made a gesture of emphatic dismissal.

"Beaver," he said, "the man is simply stringing you along this time. He couldn't possibly use these things to connect up this crime. As a matter of fact, we have evidence now which indicates very strongly that the crime was actually committed by three Hindus. We've got a straight tip from a stool pigeon who is covering the Hindu section here."

The spy insisted: "It doesn't make any difference, Sergeant, whether or not Hindus committed the crime. I'm telling you that Lester Leith is serious about this, and that he's going to use these things to work out a solution that will leave *him* in possession of that ruby."

"No," went on Sergeant Ackley, "you have overplayed your hand, Beaver. You went too far trying to get him to take an interest in this crime."

"But," protested the harassed spy, "what else could I do? Every time he pulls a job, you come down on him, triumphantly certain that you've cornered him at last, and every time he squirms out of the corner and leaves you holding the sack. As a result, he knows that you have some method of finding out what he is doing all the time. It's a wonder to me that he doesn't suspect me."

"Well," said Sergeant Ackley coldly, "you don't need to wonder any more, Beaver, because he does suspect you. He wouldn't have given you all this line of hooey unless he did."

"If it's hooey," snapped Beaver, "he's spending a lot of money."

"How do you mean?"

Beaver unfolded the morning paper which lay on the sergeant's desk.

"Take a look at the Classified Advertising Section," he said.

"Wanted: A young woman of pleasing personality and attractive looks, who has had at least three years experience on the stage in a chorus, preferably in a musical comedy or burlesque. She must have been out of work for at least eight months."

"And here's another one," said Beaver, and he pointed to another ad.

"Wanted: Ambitious young man to learn detective work at my expense. Must be a man who has had no previous experience and who knows nothing of routine police procedure. I want to train a detective who has a fresh outlook, entirely untrammeled by conventional ideas of police routine. All expenses will be paid, in addition to a generous salary. Preferably someone who has recently arrived from a rural community."

Sergeant Ackley sat back in his chair. "I'll be—"

"Now, then," said the spy, "if he doesn't intend to do something about that Navin murder, what the devil does he want to go to all this trouble for?"

"It doesn't make sense, Beaver," Ackley said. "No matter how you look at it, it's crazy."

The spy shrugged his shoulders.

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"Perhaps," he said, "that's why he's always so successful."

"How do you mean, Beaver?"

"Because his stuff doesn't make sense, Sergeant. It's unconventional and so absolutely unique, there's no precedent to help you."

Sergeant Ackley fished a cigar from his waistcoat pocket.

"Beaver," he said, "the real standard of a good detective is his ability to separate the wheat from the chaff. Now, I'm willing to admit that Leith has done some crazy things before, and they've always worked out. But this is once it won't happen."

"Well," said the undercover man, getting to his feet, "you can have it your own way, but I'm willing to bet he's up to something. I'll bet you fifty dollars against that watch that you're so proud of."

Cupidity glittered in Sergeant Ackley's eyes. "Bet me what?"

"Bet you," said Beaver, "that he uses every one of these things to work out a scheme by which he lifts that Indian ruby, and does it all so cleverly that you can't pin anything on him."

Sergeant Ackley's broad hand smacked down on the top of the desk.

"Beaver," he said, "your language verges on insubordination. Just by way of disciplining you, I am going to take that bet. Fifty dollars against my watch.

"However, Beaver, if he is going to use other means to catch that murderer and hijack the ruby, the bet is off. He's got to do it by these particular means."

"That's the bet," said Beaver.

"And you've got to keep me posted as to everything that he's doing, so that if he should use all of the stuff as a smokescreen and try to get the ruby under cover of all this hooey, we can still catch him."

"Certainly," said the undercover man.

Lester Leith smiled urbanely at his valet. "Scuttle," he said, "this is Miss Dixie Dormley, and Mr. Harry Vare. Miss Dormley is a young woman who is doing some special work for me. She has had rather extensive stage experience, but has recently been out of work. In the position that I want her to fill, it will be necessary that she have some rather striking clothes, and I want you to go around with her to the various shops, let her pick out what clothing she desires, and see that it is charged to me."

The valet blinked his eyes.

"Very good, sir," he said. "What is the limit in regard to price, sir?"

"No limit, Scuttle. Also, I have arranged for Miss Dormley to have the apartment next to us, temporarily," said Lester Leith. "She will live there — the one on the left."

"Yes, sir," said the valet.

"And Mr. Harry Vare," said Lester Leith, "is the fortunate young man who has won the free scholarship in my school of deductive reasoning."

The valet stared at Harry Vare.

Vare met that stare with eyes that were hard and appraising. He narrowed the lids and scrutinized the

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undercover operative as though he were trying to hypnotize the man.

"Harry Vare," said Lester Leith suavely, "is a young man from the country who has recently come to the city in search of some employment which would be worthy of his talents. He felt that he had outgrown the small town in which he lived. He is possessed of that first essential for detective work — an imagination which makes him see an ulterior motive in every action, a crime in every set of circumstances."

The undercover operative was dignified.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, "but as I understand it, sir, most of the real detectives are somewhat the other way. They regard it as a business, sir."

Lester Leith shook his head.

"No, Scuttle," he said. "Sergeant Ackley is one of the shrewdest detectives that I know, and you must admit, Scuttle, that he has one of those imaginations which makes him see a crime in everything."

The girl looked from face to face with a twinkle in her eyes. She was a beautiful woman.

"Mr. Vare," said Lester Leith, "will have the apartment on the right — the one adjoining us. He will be domiciled there temporarily, Scuttle."

"Yes, sir," said the valet. "May I ask, what are the duties of these persons?"

"Mr. Vare is going to be a detective," said Lester Leith gravely. "He will detect."

"What will he detect?"

"That is the interesting part of having a professional detective about, Scuttle. One never knows what he is going to detect. There is Sergeant Ackley, for instance. He detects so many things which seem utterly unreasonable at the time, and then, after mature investigation and reflection, they seem to have an entirely different complexion."

The spy cleared his throat.

"And the young lady, sir?"

"Miss Dormley," said Lester Leith, "will engage in dramatic acting upon the stage which was so well described by Shakespeare."

"What stage is that?" asked the undercover man.

"The world," said Lester Leith.

"Very good, sir," the valet said. "And when do I start on this shopping tour?"

"Immediately," said Lester Leith, "And by the way, Scuttle, did you get me the money and the diamond stick-pin?"

The valet opened a box which he took from his pocket.

"Yes, sir," he said. "You wanted rather a large diamond with something of a fault in it, something that wasn't too expensive, I believe you said."

"Yes," said Lester Leith. "That's right, Scuttle."

"This is sent on approval," said the valet. "The price tag is on the pin, sir."

Lester Leith looked at the diamond pin, and whistled.

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"Rather a low price, Scuttle," he said.

"Yes, sir," said the valet. "There's quite a flaw in the diamond, although it doesn't appear until you examine it closely."

"And the money?"

"Yes, sir," said the valet, and took from his pocket a sheaf of bank notes.

Lester Leith gravely arranged them so that the fifties were on the outside. Then he rolled them and snapped the roll with an elastic.

Lester Leith turned to Vare.

"Vare," he said, "are you ready to start detecting?"

"I thought I was going to be given a course of instruction," he said.

"You are," said Lester Leith, "but you are going to learn by a new method. You know, they used to teach law by reading out of law books, and then they decided that that wasn't the proper way to give the pupils instruction. They switched to what is known as the case method — that is, Vare, they read cases to them and let the students delve into the reported cases until they found the legal principles which had been applied to the facts."

"Yes, sir," said Vare.

"That is the way you are going to learn detective work," said Lester Leith. "By the case method. Are you ready to start?"

Vare nodded.

Lester Leith removed the tiepin from his tie, placed it on the table, and inserted the diamond stickpin.

"Very well, Vare," he said. "Get your hat and come with me. You are about to receive the first lesson."

There was the usual crowd in front of the ticket windows of the big railroad station. Everywhere there was noise, bustle, and confusion.

"Now," said Lester Leith to Harry Vare, "keep about twenty feet behind me and watch sharply. See if you can find anyone who looks like a crook."

Vare cocked a professional eye at the crowd.

"They all look like crooks," he said.

Lester Leith nodded gravely.

"Vare," he said, "you are showing the true detective instincts. But I want you to pick out someone who looks like a crook we can pin something definite on."

"I don't see exactly what you mean," said Vare.

"You will," said Lester Leith. "Just follow me."

Lester Leith pushed his way through the crowd, with Vare tagging along behind him. From time to time Lester Leith pulled out the roll of bills and counted them, apparently anxious to see that they were safe. Then he snapped the elastic back on the roll and pushed it back in his pocket.

Leith kept in the most congested portions of the big depot.

Twice he was bumped into, and each time by a sad-faced individual with mournful eyes and a drooping mouth.

The man was garbed in a dark suit,

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and his tie was conservative. Everything about him blended into a single drab personality which would attract no attention.

Finally, Lester Leith walked to a closed ticket window, where there was a little elbow room.

"Well, Vare," he said, "did you see anyone?"

Vare said: "Well, I saw several that looked like crooks, but I couldn't see anyone that I could pick out as being a certain particular crook. That is, I couldn't find any proof."

Lester Leith put his hand in his pocket, and then suddenly jumped backwards.

"Robbed!" he said.

Vare stared at him with sagging jaw.

"Robbed?" he asked.

"Robbed," said Lester Leith. "My money — it's gone!"

He pulled his hand from his trousers pocket, and disclosed a slit which had been cut in the cloth so that the contents of the pocket could be reached from the outside.

"Pickpockets," said Harry Vare.

"And you didn't discover them," Leith said.

Vare fidgeted uneasily.

"There was quite a crowd," he said, "and of course I couldn't see everything."

Lester Leith shook his head sadly.

"I can't give you a high mark on the first lesson, Vare," he said. "Now let's take a cab and go home."

"Your tiepin is safe, anyway," said Vare.

Lester Leith gave a sudden start, reached his hand to his tie, and pulled out the diamond scarf-pin.

He looked at the diamond and nodded, then suddenly pointed to the pin.

"Look," he said, "the man tried to take it off with nippers. You can see where they left their mark on the pin. I must have pulled away just as he was doing it, so that he didn't get a chance to get the diamond."

Vare's eyes were large; his face showed consternation.

"Really," said Lester Leith, "you have had two lessons in one, and I can't give you a high mark on either. You should have detected the person who was putting nippers on my pin."

Vare looked crestfallen.

Leith said: "Oh, well, you can't expect to become a first-class detective overnight. That's one of the things that training is for. But we'll go back to the apartment and I'll change my clothes, and you can sit back and concentrate for an hour or two on what you saw, and see if you can remember anything significant."

But a little later Lester Leith returned to the depot — alone. Once more he mingled with the crowd, moving aimlessly about, but this time his eyes were busy scanning the faces of the stream of people.

He noticed the man in the dark suit with the mournful countenance, moving aimlessly about, a newspaper in his hands, his manner that of one who is waiting patiently for a wife who was to have met him an hour ago.

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Lester Leith walked behind this man, keeping him in sight.

After some fifteen minutes, Leith shortened the distance between them and tapped the man sharply on the shoulder.

"I want to talk with you," he said.

The man's face changed expression. The look of mournful listlessness vanished, and the eyes became hard and wary.

"You ain't got nothing on me."

Lester Leith laughed.

"On the contrary," he said, "you have got something of mine on you — a roll of bills with some fifties on the outside and dollar bills in between. Also, you have the scarf-pin which you just nipped from that fat gentleman with the scarlet tie."

The man backed away, and turned as though getting ready to run.

Lester Leith said: "I'm not a detective. I just want to talk with you. In fact, I want to employ you."

The pickpocket looked at him with eyes that were wide with surprise.

"Employ me?" he asked.

"Yes," said Lester Leith. "I have been strolling around here all afternoon looking for a good pickpocket."

"I'm not a pickpocket," said the man.

Lester Leith paid no attention to the man's protestation of innocence.

"I am," he said, "running a school for young detectives. I want to employ you as an assistant instructor. I have an idea that the ordinary training of police officers and detectives is exceedingly haphazard. I am looking for someone who can give my students an education in picking pockets."

"What's the pay?"

"Well," said Lester Leith, "you can keep the watch that you got from the tall thin man, the scarf-pin which you nipped from the fleshy man, and you can keep the roll of bills which you cut from my trousers pocket. In addition to that, you will draw regular compensation of one hundred dollars a day, and if you feel like risking your liberty, you can keep anything which you can pick up on the side."

"How do you mean, 'on the side'?"

"By the practice of your profession, of course," said Lester Leith.

The pickpocket stared at him.

"This," he said, "is some kind of a smart game to get me to commit myself."

Lester Leith reached to his inside pocket and took out a well-filled wallet. He opened the wallet, and the startled eyes of the pickpocket caught sight of a number of one-hundred-dollar bills.

Gravely Lester Leith took out one of these hundred-dollar bills and extended it to the pickpocket.

"This," he said, "is the first day's salary."

The man took the one-hundred-dollar bill, and his eyes followed the wallet as Lester Leith returned it to his pocket.

"Okay, boss," he said. "What do you want me to do?"

"Just meet me," said Lester Leith, "at certain regular times and places.

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Your first job will be to meet me here at nine thirty tonight. I will write a bunch of instructions on a piece of paper, and put that piece of paper in my coat pocket. You can slip the paper out of the coat pocket and follow instructions. Don't let on that you know me at all, unless I should speak to you first."

The pickpocket nodded.

"Okay," he said. "I'll be here at nine thirty. In the meantime, I'll walk as far as your taxicab with you and talk over details. My name is Sid Bentley. What's yours?"

"Leith," Lester Leith told him.

"Pleased to meet you."

After they had finished shaking hands, Lester Leith started toward the taxicab and Bentley walked on his right side, talking rapidly.

"I don't know how you made me, Leith," he said, "but you can believe it or not, it's the first time I've ever been picked up by anybody. I used to be a sleight-of-hand artist on the stage, and then when business got bad, I decided to go out and start work. I haven't a criminal record and the police haven't got a thing on me."

"That's fine," beamed Lester Leith. "You're exactly the man I want. I'll meet you here at nine thirty, eh, Bentley?"

"Nine thirty it is, Captain."

Lester Leith hailed a taxicab. As it swung into the circle in front of the depot, he turned casually to the pickpocket.

"By the way, Bentley," he said, "please don't use that knife. You've already ruined one good suit for me."

As Lester Leith spoke, his left hand shot out and clamped around the wrist of the pickpocket. The light gleamed on the blade of a razor-like knife with which Bentley had been about to cut Lester Leith's coat.

Bentley looked chagrined for a moment, and then sighed.

"You said that it'd be all right for me to pick up anything I could on the side, Captain," he protested.

Lester Leith grinned.

"Well," he said, "I had better amplify that. You can pick up anything you can on the side, provided you leave my pockets alone."

Bentley matched Lester Leith's grin.

"Okay, Captain," he said. "That's a go."

Lester Leith climbed in the taxicab and returned to his apartment.

A vision of loveliness greeted him as he opened the door. Dixie Dormley had adorned herself in garments which looked as though they had been tailored to order in the most exclusive shops.

She smiled a welcome to Lester Leith.

"I kept the cost as low as I could," she said, "in order to get the effect that you wanted."

"You certainly got the effect," complimented Lester Leith, staring at her with very evident approval. "Yes, I think you have done very well, indeed, and we will all go to dinner tonight — the four of us. You, Miss Dormley, Mr. Vare, and, Scut-

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tle, I'm going to include you too."

The spy blinked his eyes. "Yes, sir."

"By the way," said Lester Leith, "did you have the imitation ruby made?"

The spy nodded.

"It's rather a swell affair," he said, "so far as the ruby is concerned. The gold setting is rather cleverly done too. The jeweler insisted upon doing it in a very soft gold. He said that the Indian gold was very yellow and very soft, without much alloy in it. He's duplicated the border design very accurately."

"Quite right, Scuttle," said Lester Leith. "The man knows what he is doing. Let's see it."

The spy handed Lester Leith a little casket, which Leith opened.

The girl exclaimed in admiration.

"Good heavens," she said, "it looks genuine!"

Lester Leith nodded. "It certainly does," he said. "They are able to make excellent imitations of rubies these days."

He lifted the imitation jewel from the case and dropped it carelessly in his side pocket.

"All right, Dixie," he said. "If you'll dress for dinner, we'll leave rather early. I have an important appointment at nine thirty. By the way, I don't want either of you to mention to a living soul that this ruby is an imitation."

At dinner that evening Lester Leith was in rare form. He was suave and courteous, acting very much the gentleman, and discharging his duties as host. It was when the dessert had been cleared away that Leith gravely surveyed Harry Vare's countenance.

"Vare," he said, "you have had your first lesson this afternoon. Do you think that you have profited by it?"

Vare flushed.

"I'll say one thing," he said, "no pickpocket will ever get near you again as long as I'm around."

Lester Leith nodded.

"That's fine," he said, "Now then, I have a rather valuable bauble here that I want to have guarded carefully. I am going to ask you to put it in your pocket."

And Lester Leith slipped from his pocket the imitation ruby and passed it across the table to Vare.

Vare gave a gasp, and his eyes bulged.

"Good heavens," he said, "this is worth a fortune!"

Lester Leith shrugged.

"I am making no comments, Vare," he said, "on its value. It is merely something which is entrusted to you for safekeeping, as a part of your training in detective work."

Vare slipped the gem hurriedly into his pocket.

Lester Leith caught the eye of the waiter and secured the check, which he paid.

"I want you folks to take a little walk with me," he said. "Vare is going to have another lesson as a detective, and I would like to have all of you present."

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The spy was plainly ill at ease.

"You want me there also, sir?" he asked.

"Certainly," said Lester Leith.

"Very well, sir," said the spy.

Leith helped the young woman on with her wraps, saw that she was seated comfortably in the taxicab, and told the driver to take them to the depot.

The spy stared at him curiously.

"You're leaving town, sir?" he asked.

"Oh, no," said Lester Leith. "We're just going down to the depot, and I'm going to walk around the way I did this afternoon. Vare is going to see that my pocket isn't picked."

There was not as large a crowd in the depot at night, and Lester Leith had some difficulty in finding a crowd of sufficient density to suit his purpose. In his side pocket was a note:

"The young man who is following me around has an imitation ruby in his pocket. He is watching me to make certain that no one picks my pocket. See if you can get the ruby from him, and after you have it, return it to me later."

Bentley, the pickpocket, stood on the outskirts of a crowd of people who were waiting in line at a ticket window, and gave Lester Leith a significant glance. Leith gestured toward his pocket.

Leith pushed his way into the crowd, and, as he did so, felt Bentley's fingers slip the printed instructions from his pocket.

Thereafter, Lester Leith wandered aimlessly about the depot, until suddenly he heard a choked cry from Harry Vare.

Lester Leith turned and retraced his steps to the young man, who was standing with a sickly gray countenance, his eyes filled with despair.

"What is it?" asked Lester Leith.

Vare indicated a gaping cut down the side of his coat and through his vest.

"I put that gem on the inside of my vest," he said, "where I knew that it would be safe from pickpockets, and look what happened!"

Lester Leith summoned the undercover man.

"Scuttle," he said, "will you notice what has happened? This young man whom I was training to be a detective has allowed the property with which I entrusted to him to be stolen."

The valet blinked.

"I didn't see anyone, sir," he said, "and I was keeping my own eye peeled."

"Scuttle," Lester Leith said, "I am going to ask you to take Vare back to his apartment. Let him sit down and meditate carefully for two hours upon everything that happened and every face he saw while he was here at the depot. I want to see if he can possibly identify the man who is guilty of picking his pocket."

Vare said humbly: "I'm afraid, sir, that you picked a poor student."

Lester Leith smiled.

"Tut, tut, Vare," he said, "that's something for me to determine. I

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told you that I was going to give you an education, and I am. You're getting a free scholarship as well as wages. So don't worry about it. Go on to your apartment, and sit down and concentrate."

Vare said: "It certainly is wonderful of you to take the thing this way."

"That's all right, Vare."

As the undercover man took Vare's arm and piloted him toward a taxicab, Lester Leith turned to Dixie Dormley with a smile.

"I've got to meet a party here in a few minutes," he said, "and then we can go and dance."

They continued to hang around the depot for fifteen or twenty minutes. Lester Leith began to frown and to consult his wrist watch. Suddenly Sid Bentley, the pickpocket, materialized through one of the doorways and hurried toward them.

"It's okay," he said.

Leith frowned at him.

"You took long enough doing it," he said.

"I'm sorry I kept you waiting," Bentley said, "but there was one thing that I had to do. You should have figured it out yourself, Chief."

"What was that?"

"I had to go to a good fence and make sure that the thing I had was an imitation," said Bentley.

"Well," Leith said, "there's nothing like being frank."

"That's the way I figure it, Chief," he said. "You know, I've got a duty to you, but I've got a duty to my profession, too. I certainly would have been a dumb hick to have had my hands on a fortune and let it slip."

Lester Leith felt the weight of the jewel in his pocket. He nodded and turned away.

"That's all right, Bentley," he said. "You meet me here tomorrow night at seven o'clock, and in the meantime there won't be anything more for you unless I should get in touch with you. Can you give me a telephone number where I can get in touch with you if I should need you?"

The pickpocket reached in his pocket and took out a card.

"Here you are, Chief," he said. "Just ring up that number and leave word that you'll be at some particular place at some particular time. Don't try to talk with me over the telephone. Just leave that message. Then you go to that place, and I'll be hanging around. If the thing looks safe to me, I'll be there. And if I don't hear from you I'll be here tomorrow night at seven."

"Okay," said Leith.

"Dixie," he said, "I've got something for you to do which is rather confidential. I am going to take you to a night club where there's a chap by the name of Bob Lamont. He makes this night club his regular hangout. He will probably have a companion with him, but, from what I've heard, he has a roving eye. I want you to see to it that his eye roves your way, and that you dance with him. After that, we'll try and make a foursome if we

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can. If we can't, you can date him up for tomorrow night. Think you can do it?"

"Brother," she said, "in these clothes, if I can't stop any roving masculine eye, I'm going out of show business."

Sergeant Arthur Ackley banged upon the door of the apartment. Bolts clicked back as Harry Vare opened the door and stared stupidly at Sergeant Ackley.

Sergeant Ackley pushed his way into the apartment without a word, slammed the door shut behind him, strode across the room to a chair, and sat down.

"Well, young man," he said, "you've got yourself into a pretty pickle."

Harry Vare blinked and started to talk, but words failed him.

Sergeant Ackley flipped back his coat so that Harry Vare's eyes could rest on the gold badge pinned to his vest.

"Well," he said, "what have you got to say for yourself?"

"I — I — I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, yes you do," said Sergeant Ackley. "You're teamed up with this super-crook and you're hashing up a scheme to assist in hijacking a big ruby."

Vare shook his head.

"No, sir," he said, "you're mistaken. I had a big ruby which was given to me to keep, but somebody stole it."

Sergeant Ackley let his eyes bore into those of Harry Vare. Then he got to his feet, reached out and thrust a broad hand to the collar of Vare's coat, twisting it tightly.

"Well," he said, "it'll be about ten years for you, and you'd better come along."

Vare stared at Sergeant Ackley with pathetic eyes.

"I haven't done anything," he said.

Sergeant Ackley eyed the man shrewdly.

"Listen," he said, "did you ever hear of George Navin?"

"You mean the man who was murdered?" asked Harry Vare.

Ackley nodded.

"I read something about it in the paper," said Vare.

"All right," said Sergeant Ackley. "Navin was murdered for a big Indian ruby. Bob Lamont was his secretary. Does that mean anything to you?"

"No, sir," said Vare. "Not a thing."

"All right," said Sergeant Ackley. "I'll tell you a few things, and you can see how much it means to you. This fellow Lester Leith that you're working for is one of the cleverest crooks this city has ever produced. He makes a living out of robbing crooks of their ill-gotten spoils. He's slick and he's clever, and he usually dopes out the solution of a crime in advance of the police, and then shakes down the crook before we get to him."

"I didn't know that," said Harry Vare.

"Well, maybe you did, and maybe you didn't," said Sergeant Ackley.

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"That's something for you to tell the jury when you come up for trial. But here's something else that you may like to listen to. Lester Leith picked up this chorus girl, and the two of them went out last night after they left you and picked up Bob Lamont and some other woman.

"Lester Leith is pretty much of a gentleman, and he wears his clothes well, and this chorus girl he had with him looked like a million dollars in a lot of high-priced clothes. The night club was more or less informal, and she gave Bob Lamont the eye. Bob fell for her and started to dance with her, and before the evening was finished they had moved to another table and were having a nice little foursome."

"But," said Harry Vare, gathering courage, "what has that got to do with me?"

Sergeant Ackley studied him in shrewd appraisal.

"So," he said, "they made another date for tonight, and the four of them are going out."

Harry Vare suddenly caught his breath. His eyes grew wide and dark with apprehension.

"Good heavens!" he said.

Sergeant Ackley nodded. "I thought so," he said.

Panic showed in Vare's face.

"You've got just ten seconds to come clean," said Sergeant Ackley. "If you come clean and give me the low-down on this thing, and agree to work with me, there's a chance that we may give you immunity from prosecution. Otherwise, you're going to jail for at least ten years."

Harry didn't need ten seconds. He was blurting out speech almost before Sergeant Ackley had finished.

"I didn't know the name," he said, "and I didn't know it was Lamont until you told me. But Lester Leith hired me to study detective work. He had his pocket picked once yesterday, and then gave me a jewel to carry, and it was picked from my pocket. I felt all broken up about it, but Mr. Leith said that it was all right, I'd have to learn a step at a time.

"He told me that tonight he was going to teach me how to make an arrest. He said that I was to arrest him, just as though he had been a crook. He said that he was going out to a dinner party tonight with another man and a woman, and that they would probably wind up at the man's apartment; that after they got to the apartment, he had it fixed up that Dixie Dormley — that's the chorus girl — was to take the other girl out for a few moments, and that, as soon as that happened, I was to come busting in as a detective and accuse Lester Leith of some crime, handcuff him, and lead him out."

Sergeant Ackley frowned. "That's everything you know about it?"

"Everything," said Harry Vare; "but I get more instructions later."

"Well," Ackley said, "I'm going to give you a break. If you do exactly as I tell you, and don't tell Lester Leith that I was here, I'll see that you get a break and aren't arrested."

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"That's all right, officer," Harry Vare said. "I'll do anything you say —"

Lester Leith handed Sid Bentley, the mournful-faced pickpocket, a one-hundred-dollar bill. "Wages for another day," he said.

Bentley pocketed the hundred and looked with avaricious eyes at the wallet which Leith returned to his breast pocket. "Speaking professionally," he said, "you'd do better to carry your bills in a fold. That breast-pocket stuff is particularly vulnerable."

"I know it," Leith said, "but I like to have my money where I can get at it."

Bentley nodded, his milk-mild eyes without expression. "I," he said, "like people who carry their money where I can get at it."

"Remember our bargain," Leith said.

"What do you suppose makes me feel so bad about getting a hundred bucks?" Bentley asked. "I'm just figuring I made a poor bargain."

"You mean the work's too hard?"

"No, that there are too many restrictions. I'm commencing to think I could make a good living just following *you* around."

Leith lowered his voice. "Where," he asked, "do you suppose I make all this money?"

Bentley said: "Now, buddy, you've got me interested."

Leith said: "We're working on the same side of the street."

"You don't mean you're a dip?"

"No, but I'm a crook. I'm a confidence man."

"What's the game?" Bentley asked.

Leith said: "I have different rackets. Right now, it's sticking a sucker with that imitation ruby. I show the ruby to the man I'm aiming to trim. I tell him I found it on the street, that I don't know whether it's any good or not, that I presume it isn't good, but that even as an imitation, it should have some value. I ask him what he thinks about it.

"If he's a real gem expert, I know it from what he says. He tells me to go home and forget it. I thank him, and that's all there is to it. But if he's a little dubious about whether it's genuine, I gradually let him think I'm a sucker. You see, this ruby is the exact duplicate of a valuable ruby that has been in the newspapers."

Bentley said: "That's what fooled me about it the first time I saw it."

"You recognized it?"

"Sure."

"Well," Leith said, "lots of other people will, too. They'll think it's the genuine priceless ruby. Some of them will want to buy it. Some of them won't. If the guy offers me anything like five hundred dollars for it, I'm perfectly willing to sell."

Bentley said: "I'm still listening."

"The big trouble," Leith said, "is the risk."

"How do you mean?"

"I've got too many of them out," Leith said. "These imitations cost me about fifteen dollars apiece. I've

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been playing the racket for a week."

"You're afraid some of the suckers have made a squawk?"

"Yes."

Bentley said: "I know just how you feel. When a racket gets hot, you know you should leave it, but there's still coin in it, so you want to hang on."

Leith said: "That's where you come in."

"What do you mean?"

Leith said: "I want you to follow me around from now on whenever I'm going to make a sale."

"What do I do?"

"Just this," Leith said. "A cop can't make a pinch until after I've made a sale. In order to do that, they'll have to plant a ringer on me for a sucker, and have the payments made to me in marked money."

"No, they won't," Bentley said. "You're all wet there, brother. They can *either* have the marked money on you, or they can pinch both you and the sucker and hold the sucker as a material witness."

Leith said: "That last is what I'm afraid of. If that happens, I want you to get the evidence."

"You mean from the sucker?"

"Yes."

"Listen, brother. That evidence will be just as hot as a stove lid. I couldn't —"

Leith took from his pocket a little cloth sack to which was attached a printed tag with a postage stamp on the tag.

"You don't keep it on you for a minute," he said. "You just beat it for the first mailbox, drop it, and let Uncle Sam do the dirty work."

Bentley said: "That's more like it."

"Whenever you do that you get a five-hundred-dollar bonus."

"And that's all I have to do?"

"That's all."

"And my cut is still a hundred bucks a day."

"That's right. You just have to follow me around."

"Lead me to it," Bentley said. "But you'll have to tell me when you're going to make a deal."

Leith said: "In about an hour, Miss Dormley, the young lady who was with me last night, and I are going out to dinner with another couple. I've fixed things up with Miss Dormley so she'll get the other girl out of the way. That will leave me alone with the man. I figure I can put the deal across with him."

"I'll be tagging along."

Leith said: "Carry this mailing sack where you can put your hand on it in an instant. Don't ever be caught without it."

"Listen, buddy," Bentley said, "don't think I was born yesterday. If you think I want to be caught with goods that will hook me up as your confederate, you're cockeyed. And don't pull your stuff in a place where there isn't a mailbox on every corner, because if you do, it's just your hard luck."

Sergeant Arthur Ackley stared reproachfully at Beaver, the undercover

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operative. "Right under your nose, Beaver," he said, "and you muffed it."

The spy's face colored. "What do you mean, I muffed it? I'm the one that told you he was going after that ruby."

Sergeant Ackley said: "You argued a lot, Beaver, and became personally offensive, but you didn't give me anything constructive."

"What do you mean, constructive?"

"You didn't even smell a rat when he brought that green kid in to act as a detective," Ackley said.

Beaver sighed. "Oh, what's the use! Just don't forget that we have a bet. If all those various things I told you about fit into his plan to get the ruby, I win your watch."

"Not at all, Beaver," said Ackley. "You have overlooked one little fact. It was to have been done so cleverly that I couldn't pin anything on him. You overlooked that little thing, Beaver, and that's going to cost you fifty bucks — because I've already got it pinned on him."

Beaver said: "I suppose you know every step in his campaign."

Sergeant Ackley gloated. "You bet I do."

The spy scraped back his chair and got to his feet.

Sergeant Ackley said: "Don't go to bed until after midnight, Beaver. I'll be calling you some time before then to come down to headquarters. Leith will be booked and in a cell. Then you can have the pleasure of telling him that you helped put him there — and you can pay over the fifty bucks to me."

Beaver lunged toward the door. "You've thought you had him before," he flung back, on the threshold.

Sergeant Ackley laughed. "But this time, Beaver, I *have* got him. I threw a scare into that green kid Vare, and he told me everything."

The four people left the taxicab and walked across the sidewalk to the entrance of the apartment house. Dixie Dormley, attired in soft white was vibrantly beautiful. The other young woman, although expensively gowned, seemed drab and insignificant in comparison.

Lester Leith, well-tailored, faultlessly groomed, wore his evening clothes with an air of distinction. Bob Lamont was quick and nervous. He seemed ill at ease.

The four people chatted as they went up in the elevator, and Bob Lamont opened the door of his apartment with something of a flourish.

It was an apartment which was well and tastefully furnished. As secretary to George Navin, Lamont had drawn a very good salary.

When the two young women were seated, Lamont went to the kitchenette to get the makings of drinks.

Lester Leith gave a significant glance at Dixie Dormley.

She caught the glance, turned at once to the other young woman, and exclaimed: "Oh, my heavens, I left my purse in that taxicab! Or else it may have fallen out on the sidewalk;

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I don't know which. It seems to me that I heard something drop to the running board as I got out."

The young woman said: "Never mind, Dixie, you can telephone the taxicab company, and they'll have it in the Lost and Found Department."

"Yes," wailed Dixie, "but suppose it dropped to the running board. Then it would have spilled off at the corner."

Lester Leith reached for his hat.

"I'll run down and see."

Dixie Dormley got to her feet quickly and started to the door.

"No, please," she said. "You wait here. I can't explain, but I'd much rather go by myself, unless Vivian wants to come with me."

She flashed the other young woman a smile of invitation, and Vivian promptly arose.

"Tell Bob that we'll be right back," she said.

As the door closed behind the two women, Lester Leith strolled out into the kitchenette where Lamont was taking ice cubes from a refrigerator.

"Well, Lamont," said Lester Leith casually, "you pulled that murder pretty cleverly, didn't you?"

Lamont dropped the ice-cube tray with a clatter, and stared at Lester Leith with bulging eyes. "What the devil are you talking about?"

"Oh, you know well enough, Lamont," he said. "The police were a little bit slow in catching up with you, that's all, but the scheme wasn't really so clever. The guards shut all of the windows and locked the shutters on the inside when they went into Navin's room, but you were the last one in there. It would have been very easy for you to have moved against one of the windows and unlocked one of the shutters. Then you left the room, went directly to the safe, took out the gem, and went to your conference with the lawyer, which gave you your alibi. In the morning you walked in and locked the shutter again from the inside.

"You'd probably been bribed by the Hindus to leave one of the steel shutters unlocked, and had specified that they must break in and do the job promptly at four o'clock, so that the police would be properly confused.

"Where the police made their mistake was in thinking that whoever had committed the murder had also stolen the gem from the safe. It didn't occur to them that they could have been independent acts. And apparently, so far, it hasn't occurred to the Hindus. They thought simply that they failed to find the gem, and that Navin had placed it in some other hiding place.

"But you can't get away with it long, Lamont. The police will be here inside of half an hour."

"You're crazy!" said Lamont.

Lester Leith shook his head.

"No, Lamont," he said, "you're the one who's crazy. You overlooked the fact that, if the Hindus should start to talk, they had you strapped to the electric chair. And that's exactly what happened. The police got

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a confession out of one of the Hindus about fifteen minutes ago. My paper telephoned me."

Lamont's face was gray.

"Who — who are you?" he asked.

"I'm a free-lance reporter," said Lester Leith, "who works on feature stuff for some of the leading papers. Right now I'm assigned to cover the story of your arrest in the Navin case. The newspaper knew it was going to break sometime within the next twenty-four to forty-eight hours. Now if you would like to pick up a little money that would come in handy when it becomes necessary to retain an attorney to represent you, you can give us an exclusive interview. In fact, the only thing for you to do is to confess and try and get a life sentence. If you want to make your confession through my newspaper, we would bring all the political pressure to bear that we could to see that you got off with life."

There was an imperative knock on the door of the apartment.

Lester Leith strolled to it casually.

"Probably the police now, Lamont."

He opened the door.

Harry Vare burst into the room.

"You're under arrest!" he snapped at Lester Leith.

Lester Leith stepped back and eyed Vare with well-simulated amazement.

"What the devil are you talking about?" he asked.

"Your name's Lamont," said Vare, "and you're under arrest for the murder of George Navin. I'm representing the Indian priests who are trying to recover the gem, and I'm going to take you to police headquarters with me right now."

Lester Leith said: "You're crazy. My name's Leith. I'm not Lamont. That's Lamont over there, the man you want. I'm working for a newspaper."

Harry Vare laughed, scornfully.

"I saw you come in here and had the doorman point out the one who lived here. He pointed to you."

"You fool," Leith said, "he made a mistake, or rather you did. He pointed to this man here, and you thought he was pointing me out."

Vare snapped a gun into view, and fished for handcuffs with his left hand.

"Hold out your wrist," he said, "or I'll blow you apart."

Lester Leith hesitated a moment, then held out his wrist, reluctantly. Vare snapped one of the handcuffs to Leith's wrist, locked the other one around his own wrist, and said "Come on, you slicker, you're going to headquarters."

Leith said: "Listen! You're making the biggest mistake of your life. You're letting the real murderer —"

Bob Lamont laughed.

He turned to Harry Vare and said: "You're quite right, officer, that's Bob Lamont that you've got under arrest, but this comes as quite as a shock to me. I've known him for two or three years, and thought he was above reproach."

"No, he wasn't," said Vare. "He was the man who murdered Navin."

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Lester Leith groaned.

"Youngster," he said, "you're making a mistake that is going to make you the laughing-stock of the city inside of twenty-four hours."

Vare muttered grimly: "Come along, Lamont."

Lester Leith sighed and accompanied Vare through the doorway to the elevator, down the elevator, across the lobby of the apartment house, and to the street.

"Well," said Leith, "that was pretty well done, Vare. You can let me loose now."

Vare took a key from his pocket and inserted it in the lock of the handcuff only after considerable difficulty. His forehead was beaded with nervous perspiration, and his hand was shaking. He made two attempts to fit the key to the lock. "I can't seem to get it," he said.

Leith glanced at him sharply. "Vare," he said, "what the devil are you trying to do?"

"Nothing."

"Give me that key."

Vare didn't pass over the key but instead looked expectantly back toward the shadows.

The voice of Sergeant Ackley said: "I'll take charge now."

There was motion from the deep shadows of the doorway of an adjoining building. Sergeant Ackley, accompanied by a plainclothes officer, stepped forward.

Leith said to Sergeant Ackley: 'What's the meaning of this?"

Ackley said: "You should know more about it than I do, Leith. You've delivered yourself to me already handcuffed."

For a moment there was consternation on Leith's face, then he masked all expression from his face and eyes.

"Didn't expect to see *me* here, did you?" Sergeant Ackley asked gloatingly.

Leith said nothing.

Sergeant Ackley said to Vare: "Give me the key to those handcuffs, young man. I'll slip one off your wrist, and put it on Leith's other wrist."

Vare extended his hand. Sergeant Ackley took the key, clocked the handcuff from Vare's arm, and snapped it around Leith's other wrist.

The rapid *click-clack click-clack* of high heels as two women rounded the corner, walking rapidly, came to Leith's ears. He turned around so that the light fell full on his face.

"Why, Mr. Leith!" Dixie Dormley exclaimed. "What's the matter?"

Lester Leith said nothing.

Sergeant Ackley grinned gloatingly. "Mr. Leith," he said, "is being arrested. You probably didn't know he was a crook."

"A crook!" she exclaimed.

From the doorway of the apartment house came a hurrying figure, attired in overcoat, hat, and gloves. He carried a light suitcase in one hand, and crossed the strip of sidewalk with three swift strides. It wasn't until he started to signal for a taxicab that he became aware of the little group.

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Sergeant Ackley said to the plainclothesman: "Get that guy."

Lamont heard the order, turned to look over his shoulder, then dropped the suitcase, and started to run.

"Help!" yelled Sergeant Ackley.

Lamont sprinted down the street. He turned to flash an apprehensive glance over his shoulder, and so did not see the figure of Sid Bentley as it slid out from the shadows.

There was a thud, a tangled mass of arms and legs, and then Bentley, sitting up on the sidewalk, said: "I got him for you, officer."

The plainclothesman ran up and grabbed Lamont by the collar. He jerked him to his feet, then said to Bentley: "That was fine work. I'm glad you stopped him."

"No trouble at all," Bentley said.

The officer said: "Come on back with me, and I'll give you a courtesy card which may help you out some time."

Bentley's eyes glistened. "Now, that'll be right nice of you, officer."

The officer pushed the reluctant Lamont back toward the little group which had, by this time, became a small, curious crowd. "Here he is, Sergeant," he said.

Sergeant Ackley said irritably: "All right, Lamont. You'd better come clean."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Lamont said.

Sergeant Ackley laughed. "Come on, Lamont, the jig's up. You killed George Navin and got that ruby. Lester Leith hijacked it from you. Now, if you'll give us the facts, you won't be any worse off for it."

Lamont said: "I don't know what you're talking about. I — I took the custody of the ruby because —"

"Careful, Lamont," Lester Leith said sharply. "Don't put your neck in a noose."

Sergeant Ackley turned and slapped Leith across the mouth. "Keep your trap shut," he said, and to the plainclothes officer: "Go ahead and search him."

"Oh, no," Lamont shouted. "You can't do it. Navin gave it to me to keep for him. I was going to turn it over to the estate."

"Gave you what?" Sergeant Ackley asked.

"The ruby."

Ackley said: "Go ahead, Lamont, tell the truth. You took the ruby, and then Lester Leith took it from you."

Lamont shook his head.

Sergeant Ackley ran his hands over Leith's coat. Abruptly he shot his hand into Leith's inside pocket and pulled out a chamois-skin bag. He reached inside of that bag, and the spectators gasped as the rays from the street light were reflected from a blood-red blob of brilliance.

"There it is," Sergeant Ackley said gloatingly.

Lamont stared, clapped his own hand to his breast pocket, became suddenly silent.

Sergeant Ackley said triumphantly to the crowd: "That's the way we work, folks. Give the crooks rope enough, and they hang themselves.

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You'll read about it in the paper tomorrow morning. Sergeant Arthur Ackley solves the Navin murder, and at the same time traps a crook who's trying to hijack the East Indian ruby. All right, boys. We're going to the station."

Leith said: "Sergeant, you're making a —"

"Shut up," Ackley said savagely. "I've been laying for you for a long time, and now I've got you."

Dixie Dormley said indignantly: "I think it's an outrage. You've struck this man when he was handcuffed. You won't let him explain."

"Shut up," Ackley growled, "or I'll take you too."

Dixie Dormley fastened glistening, defiant eyes on Sergeant Ackley. "Try to keep me from going," she said. "I'm going to be right there, and complain about your brutality.

Sid Bentley sidled up to the plain-clothes officer. "The name's Bentley, Sid Bentley. If you wouldn't mind giving me that card."

The officer nodded, pulled a card from his pocket, and scribbled on it.

"What are you doing?" Sergeant Ackley asked.

"Giving this man a courtesy card. He caught Lamont — stopped him when he was running away."

Sergeant Ackley was in a particularly expansive mood. "Here," he said, "I'll give him one, too."

Sid Bentley took the cards. He stared for a long, dubious moment at Lester Leith, then said: "Gentlemen, I thank you very much. It was a pleasure to help you. Good night."

A police car sirened its way to the curb. Sergeant Ackley loaded his prisoners into the car, and they made a quick run to headquarters with Dixie Dormley, white-faced and determined, following in a taxicab.

Sergeant Ackley said to the desk sergeant: "Well, let's get the boys from the press in here. I've solved the Navin murder, recovered the ruby, and caught a hijacker red-handed."

Dixie Dormley said: "And he's been guilty of unnecessary brutality."

One of the reporters from the press room came sauntering in. "What you got, Sergeant?" he asked.

Sergeant Ackley said: "I've solved the Navin murder."

"Hot dog," the newspaperman said.

The desk sergeant said dubiously: "Sergeant, did you take a good look at this ruby?"

Sergeant Ackley said: "I don't have to. I had the thing all doped out. I knew where it was, and how to get it. That ruby is worth a fortune. There'll be a reward for that, and —"

"There won't be any reward for this," the desk sergeant said, "unless I'm making a big mistake. This is a nice piece of red glass. You see, I know something about gems, Sergeant. I was on the jewelry detail for —"

Sergeant Ackley's jaw sagged. "You mean that isn't a real ruby?"

Lester Leith said to the desk sergeant: "If you'll permit me, I can explain. This was an imitation which I had made. It's rather a good imitation

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— it cost me fifty dollars. I gave it to a young man who wanted to be a detective to keep for me. His pocket was picked. Naturally, he was very much chagrined. I wanted to get the property returned, so I discreetly offered a reward. The property was returned earlier this evening. What I say can be established by absolute proof."

Sergeant Ackley's eyes were riveted on the red stone. "You didn't get this from Lamont?" he asked.

"Certainly not. Lamont will tell you that I didn't."

Lamont said: "I've never seen that before in my life."

"Then where's the real ruby?" Sergeant Ackley asked.

Lamont took a deep breath. "I haven't the least idea."

"What were you running away for?"

"Probably because of the manner in which you tried to make your arrest," Lester Leith interposed. "You didn't tell him you were an officer. You simply yelled, 'Get him,' and your man started for him with —"

"No such thing!" Sergeant Ackley interrupted.

"That's exactly what happened," Dixie Dormley said indignantly.

The desk sergeant said to Lester Leith: "Why didn't you tell him this was an imitation?"

Dixie Dormley said: "He tried to, and Sergeant Ackley slapped him across the mouth."

Sergeant Ackley blinked his eyes rapidly, then said: "I didn't do any such thing. I didn't touch the man."

Dixie Dormley said: "I thought you'd try to lie out of it. I have the names of a dozen witnesses who feel the same way I do about police brutality, and will join me in making a complaint."

Ackley said savagely: "Give me the list of those witnesses."

Dixie Dormley threw back her head and laughed in his face.

The sergeant said: "You know how the chief feels about that, Sergeant."

Lester Leith said quietly: "I'd like to call up my valet. He can come down here and identify that imitation ruby. It's one which he had made."

The desk sergeant reached for the telephone, but Sergeant Ackley stopped him. "I happen to know there was an imitation ruby made," he said, "if you're sure this is imitation."

The desk sergeant said: "There's no doubt about it."

Sergeant Ackley fitted a key to the handcuffs, unlocked them, said to Lester Leith: "You're getting off lucky this time. I don't know how you did it."

Leith said, with dignity: "You simply went off halfcocked, Sergeant. I wouldn't have held it against you if you'd given me a chance to explain, but you struck me when I tried to tell you that the gem you had was an imitation, that it was my property, that I have a bill of sale for it."

The newspaper reporter scribbled gleefully. "Hot dog," he said, and scurried away toward the press room.

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A moment later he was back with a camera and a flash bulb. "Let me get a picture of this," he said. "Hold up that imitation gem."

Sergeant Ackley shouted: "You can't publish this!"

The flash of the bulb interrupted his protest.

Edward H. Beaver, the undercover man, was still up when Lester Leith latchkeyed the door of the apartment. "Hello, Scuttle," he said. "Up rather late, aren't you?"

"I was waiting for a phone call."

Leith raised his eyebrows. "Rather late for a phone call, isn't it, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir. Have you seen Sergeant Ackley tonight, sir?"

"Have I seen him!" Leith said, with a smile. "I'll say I've seen him. You'll read all about it in the papers tomorrow, Scuttle. Do you know what happened? The sergeant arrested me for recovering my own property."

"Your own property, sir?"

"Yes, Scuttle. That imitation ruby. I was rather attached to it, and Vare felt so chagrined about having lost it that I thought it would be worth a small reward to get it back."

"And you recovered it?"

"Oh, yes." Leith said. "I got it earlier in the evening. Sergeant Ackley found it in my pocket and jumped to the conclusion it was the real ruby."

"What did he do?" the spy asked.

Lester Leith grinned. "He covered himself with glory," he said. "He put on quite a show for a crowd of interested spectators, and then committed the crowning indiscretion of inviting them to read about it in the paper tomorrow morning. They'll read about it, all right. Poor Ackley!"

A slow smile twisted the spy's features. "The sergeant didn't give you anything for me, did he, sir?"

"For you, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why, no. Why the devil would you be getting things from Sergeant Ackley?"

"You see, sir, I happened to run into the sergeant a day or so ago, and he borrowed my watch. He was going to return it. He —"

The phone rang and the spy jumped toward it with alacrity. "I'll answer it, sir," he said.

He picked up the receiver, said: "Hello . . . Yes . . . Oh, he did —" and then listened for almost a minute.

A slow flush spread over the spy's face. He said: "That wasn't the way I understood it. That wasn't the bet —" There was another interval during which the receiver made raucous, metallic sounds, then a bang at the other end of the line announced that the party had hung up.

The undercover man dropped the receiver back into place.

Lester Leith sighed. "Scuttle," he said, "I don't know what we're going to do about Sergeant Ackley. He's a frightful nuisance."

"Yes, sir," the spy said.

"And a very poor loser," Leith remarked.

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"I'll say he's a poor loser," the spy blurted. "Any man who will take advantage of his official position as a superior to wriggle out of paying a debt —"

"Scuttle," Lester Leith interrupted, "what the devil are you talking about?"

"Oh, another matter, sir. Something else which happened to be on my mind."

Leith said: "Well, get it off your mind, Scuttle. Bring out that bottle of Scotch and a soda siphon. We'll have a quiet drink. Just the two of us."

Beaver had just finished with the drinks when a knock sounded at the door. "See who it is, Scuttle."

Dixie Dormley and Harry Vare stood on the threshold.

Leith, on his feet, ushered them into the room, seated the actesss, indicated a chair for Vare, and said: "Two more highballs, Scuttle."

Vare said haltingly: "I'm sorry, Mr. Leith. The way the thing was put up to me, I couldn't have done any differently."

Leith dismissed the matter with a gesture.

Dixie Dormley said: "After you left, a Captain Carmichael came in. He seemed terribly upset, and was pretty angry at Sergeant Ackley. It seems that two of the people who had been standing there were friends of Captain Carmichael, and they telephoned in to him about the brutality of the police."

Leith smiled. "Is that so," he commented idly. "What happened?"

Dixie Dormley said: "Well, Sergeant Ackley had just let Lamont go — figured he didn't have any case against him. Captain Carmichael listened to what Ackley had to report, and was furious. He issued an order to have Lamont picked up again, and a radio car got him within a dozen blocks of the police station.

"They brought him back and Carmichael went to work on him, and in no time had a confession out of him. It seems he'd agreed to open one of the steel shutters for some Hindu priests. They'd paid him for the job. Then he got the idea of doublecrossing them, opened the safe, lifted the ruby, and hid it.

"He had it with him tonight when he was arrested. He swore the plainclothesman must have taken it from his pocket when they were scuffling. The plainclothesman denied it, and then they thought of this man who had first grabbed Lamont.

"So then they figured *he* was the man they wanted, and it turned out the police had not only let him go, *but given him a couple of courtesy cards.* Well, you should have heard Captain Carmichael! Such language!"

Leith turned to Vare.

"There you are, Vare," he said. "A complete education in the detection of crime by the case method. Just observe Sergeant Ackley, do the exact opposite of what he does, and you're bound to be a success."

And the police spy, resuming his mixing of the drinks, could be seen to nod, unconsciously but perceptibly.

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WINNER OF A SECOND PRIZE: VIOLA BROTHERS SHORE

Our capacity in this editorial preface is strictly that of a reporter — we could not possibly explain the origin, background, and motives of Viola Brothers Shore's work one-hundredth as accurately or revealingly as Vi Shore herself; for Vi always knows exactly where she is going and what target she is shooting at . . . In "'Bye, 'Bye, Bluebeard" the author is up to her old tricks (though there are many who would call them new tricks): butting her literary head against that wall of 'tec technique which never rises above mere gimmicks and violence; tearing down that wall to build another out of the social, human, and psychological stuff of our times.

It has been apparent for some years now that Viola Brothers Shore has veered more and more toward writing stories which spring from her own emotional and intellectual response to the problem of woman's emancipation — particularly, that emancipation of women from the many myths which have been her burden through the ages — the myth, for example, that women are "inferior" to men — the myth that women are "feelers" rather than thinkers — the myth that women have only one need to satisfy, to love and to be loved — the myth that women have only one basic role in the world's affairs, to be mothers and homemakers. Too many women, Viola Brothers Shore contends, have permitted themselves to be dominated by, and engulfed in, this archaic moonshine — and conversely, too few men have attacked these outmoded conceits, although the more intelligent and honest men recognize the myths for what they really are.

Viola Brothers Shore's prize-winning story — the first of a series about Tante Fayga Bendovid — takes issue with these figments and fancies of man's imagination, and, as you will see, with other equally important misconceptions . . . all of which may seem, to quote the author, a very large springboard for the emergence of "a very modest Tante Fayga" — a woman who is not inferior to men — a woman who has lost none of her essential womanliness merely because of her advanced age — who has lost none of her identification with all that is warm and intelligent and understanding in womankind merely because she happens to be a member of a certain religion — who has lost none of her joy in life and zest for living merely because she has attained the biblical span of years — who functions in our society as a grandmother not by reason of seniority, or senility, but

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because her continuing participation in the battle of life has equipped her for the highest duty of the old, to guide and help the young . . . and all within the framework of the modern detective story.

Viola Brothers Shore wrote to us: "But I still feel it's too ambitious and high-sounding to use as material for the introduction of a character who has not yet earned her spurs. Don't you agree?"

Obviously, we don't . . .

'BYE, 'BYE, BLUEBEARD

by VIOLA BROTHERS SHORE

THE CASE OF JOHANN MEIER IS closed. The gruesome entries in his Little Black Book hold a tragic lesson for lonely, credulous women. It seems incongruous to preface them with my own personal problems, but if I, as Prosecutor of the case, know a version which did not appear in the miles of newsprint, it is because the Meier matter was unofficially ushered into the County Attorney's Office by a visit from the lady who is and is not my mother-in-law. I am a widower but my loved and lovely wife had, during a parentless childhood, been foster-mothered by Mrs. Bendovid, who is Tante Fayga to hundreds of synthetic grandchildren, nieces, and nephews, including my staff and my only daughter Stefanie.

I looked up from my unfinished brief on the Holman case to say, as heartily as I could, "Well, I didn't know you were in town! I hope you're staying with us for a while?" Although I respect her many great human qualities, I disagree with her views on politics, psychiatry, the upbringing of my motherless child, and the prosecution of vice. As I cannot be wrong about all these things all the time, I do not precisely relish the visits of the lady who seems bent on proving that I am.

"Thanks, Don, I'm staying with a friend in Maple Park." I would describe my foster-mother-in-law as a wholesome, buxom woman dressed unobtrusively in tailored clothes but with gray hair so youthfully unruly and a smile so all-embracing that on a recent hitchhike with some Youth Group, she received marriage proposals from a Progressive farmer, a Democratic storekeeper, and a Republican banker. Frankly, as a politician myself, I don't know how she does it. "It's good to see you, Donnie. And you, Miss Harris, how is your mother?"

"I hope to find out one of these days," replied my model secretary.

I tamped down the tobacco in my pipe, determined to make the visit short and as sweet as possible. "Does Stefanie know you're in town?"

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"Who else could drag me out of New York before Election? Monday she called and I dropped everything."

"What's wrong with Steffie now?" I demanded. My daughter had always been a withdrawn, undemonstrative child, subject to endless minor ailments which, according to competent medical opinion, would disappear with adolescence.

"Well, she had a shock, but she's over the crisis. I just wanted to make sure you're going home for dinner." I glanced uneasily at the brief under my hand. "It's her birthday, Don."

Ye gods! I flipped over the calendar to the notation, *Dinner with Steffie*. I'd have to take the brief home. Mrs. Bendovid beamed maternally. "I told her you're bringing the present for a surprise."

A present, of course! It was 5:30 — "What does she want?"

I saw the look that passed. A father is supposed to know those things. "Well, she saw a wrist watch —"

"No!" I banged my desk. "Absolutely not. Anything else her heart desires."

"But if her heart desires mostly a wrist watch?"

I am not an unfeeling parent. But — "I told her if she lost the last one, it *would* be the last one! Do you know how many watches that girl has lost?"

Mrs. Bendovid gathered up her sundry newspapers and pamphlets. "Do you know why a girl keeps losing what she treasures most?"

I have no patience with psychiatric mumbo-jumbo, although I admit that a stream of governess-housekeepers can't take a mother's place. "If there's anything I can do, short of remarrying, I wish you'd tell me."

"She'll tell you herself," promised Mrs. Bendovid, but it held more of a threat than a promise.

I handed her the issue of a little magazine on Art, Science, and Society which always "happens" to turn up on my desk after her visits. "And will you send one of the girls to pick out something pretty?" I asked, without looking at my secretary.

"I'll go myself, Mr. Daniels. The girls have worked late every night." She had too, of course, and there was no mistaking the martyred undertone.

From the depths of her capacious purse Mrs. Bendovid extracted a square envelope. "Here, Donnie, write something nice. I'll have it wrapped inside and put it in your coat pocket. And if you don't like what I pick, Steffie can change it."

I thanked her heartily and wrote the card, knowing very well I would meet it next across the dial of a wrist watch. But seeing Steffie's face later as she took the oblong package out of my coat, I knew that any other gift would have been tragic stupidity. She was wearing her long party dress and I noticed with a stab how much she had grown to look like her mother, and, indeed, how much she had suddenly grown.

"I won't lose this one, Father."

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There was a new sureness in her voice and a sparkle in her eyes, and even her short brown hair had a new glint.

"There must be some magic in a sixteenth birthday," I commented gallantly, inwardly pleased at my medical friend's vindication. "Even your coloring's changed."

"Oh, ducky, that's make-up," said my little daughter. "I want you to stop regarding me as a child, and men always go by appearances." The brat. The two brats. "Of course I have to stop *acting* like a helpless, motherless child, because we *are* our actions. Isn't that a wonderful thought, Father, we are our actions?"

Yes, indeed, a wonderful thought, and I knew whose. I poured her a thimbleful of cocktail and toasted her new adult status. "And after dinner, how about a picture? Something with music."

"Thank you, Father, but we have something terribly important to discuss." Her mother had that same trick of snagging her short upper lip and drawing one dark brow over a troubled eye. "You see, I've been carrying a load of guilt for three years."

I choked on my drink. "Sorry I've been so preoccupied —"

"Oh, you mustn't blame yourself entirely. I *let* myself become a problem child, because I didn't see that's the wrong *kind* of attention. But Monday I had a shock —"

Oh, yes. I'd forgotten. "What kind of shock?"

"A very good shock, Father — very therapeutic."

Maybe for me, too, it was a therapeutic shock, hearing this brand of ventriloquism out of that little heart-shaped face. I seated her at the formal, candle-lit table like an actor doing his bit of stage business. "You didn't tell me your grandmother was in town."

"I haven't had much chance, ducky, and it's not your most favorite news."

"I have the greatest admiration —" I began.

"Of course you have, darling, and everybody can't love everybody. Tante Fayga says if *everybody* likes you, it means you're avoiding battle on important issues. That's what we've been doing instead of facing them squarely." I was facing one right then. If I didn't want this little monkey turning into a hand-hammered Bendovidite, I'd have to direct her thinking into other channels, see that she met the right kind of boys —

"Oh, poof!" She tossed the sons of our best families over a scornful shoulder. "We have a job to do, Father. A job that's right up your street!" I waited for the blow, but it hit me on an unguarded sector. "We have to catch a murderer, Father! A modern Bluebeard! You remember Ilse?"

Of course I remembered Ilse — Kraemer? — Schaeffer? — the little blonde Alsatian who was with us when Fannie died and for seven years afterward, until she left us to marry and we never heard from her again.

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I had always resented her callous indifference toward my child.

"For years I used to dream that she came back and said, 'I left Mr. Meier — I don't love him — I love you, Steffie'. And on the street I'd run after somebody with blonde hair like Ilse's —" Her fists clenched suddenly on the tablecloth. "Ilse's dead, Father. He murdered her."

"Meaning the man she married?"

"*If* he ever married her. And *if* he didn't have a dozen wives already. But you can easily find that out."

I said I'd need more facts. I guess I can't help sounding like a County Attorney.

The eagerness went out of her eyes and we were strangers fencing. "Of course. Could I have a cigarette?"

I reached for my case reluctantly. "Your grandmother approves of your smoking?"

"Oh, no, but if I'm determined to smoke, she says I must do it openly, and I'm determined, so — thank you, Father." They all do it at Eastern High, but I would have sworn mine didn't. She handled it prettily at that, this little stranger seen through a veil of smoke.

"When my mother died I was too little to realize what it meant — just something was gone and something hurt — and Ilse was there to keep it from hurting too much. You were very busy and Tante Fayga belongs to everybody, but Ilse belonged to *me* — and she was the only thing that did. I'm sorry if I say anything to hurt you —"

I begged her to disregard my feelings. I obviously hadn't concealed them very successfully.

"I didn't know about Mr. Meier. It all happened so fast, and he made her promise not to tell anyone, because people would laugh. You knew she met him through a matrimonial ad in the German Paper?"

Well, no, I hadn't. The girl had said she was leaving and I gave her a generous check and asked her to find someone to take her place.

"To take her place, Father! For ten years she lived with us. To me she was more than a — a place. She was *Ilse* — my mother and my family and my playmate and — Don't mind if I c-cry, I can't help it —"

I reached for her hand, but she blinked away the film.

"But she had to tell me because we'd always shared our secrets. You can't imagine how excited I was. As if at last something wonderful was happening to *me!* That's what you always dream about — a wedding with a veil and flowers and everybody dancing. And I pictured him like you, tall, and with square shoulders and a square chin. And I'd be a bridesmaid and catch the bouquet."

I was a little startled at this glimpse into the twelve-year-old mind. But then, I'd never taken the trouble to look into it.

"But Ilse said that women who live in other people's homes don't have the kind of marriage you see in the movies. That the one thing she wanted was a home of her own. And

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she showed me a picture of Mr. Meier's, before it burned. He'd lost his wife and child in the fire, but Ilse was going to fix it all up with her $1300, and she'd learn to love him because he was so kind. I remember she said, 'He has such a sweet smile, Steffie —'

"I believed it all, of course, but I still wasn't satisfied, and I asked, 'Wouldn't you rather have the other kind of love — the *real* kind?' Father, she nearly had that kind, once. He used to come to the house and he played the zither and he wanted her to come to Canada. But it was right after Mother died and she couldn't leave me, so he went without her and up there he forgot about her and married somebody else. You see, that's why a check wasn't enough."

She blew out the birthday candles and while she cut cake for the housekeeper and the handyman and a piece to take to Tante Fayga, I had the grace to feel ashamed of where the "callous indifference" had lain, and asked whether any of the household had met Mr. Meier — the cook, or any of the adults?

"He never came to the house except very late, when everybody was asleep. But I was so excited about Ilse's house and what fun we'd have fixing it up, that I couldn't sleep and so I heard her bring him up the stairs. And I slipped out of bed and opened the door a crack to get a peek at Ilse's Mr. Meier.

"It was the most dreadful shock! He was short and fat and partly bald with pointy ears and a thick, horrid mustache. He kissed her hand and worms crawled over me. And then he locked her trunk and suddenly I knew it was all packed and she was going far away. My mother had gone away and now Ilse. I couldn't move — I just stood there as if — as if — And then he put his arm around Ilse and I knew he was going to kiss her mouth and — *I couldn't bear it!*"

"Easy, baby." Every day I listen to stories of robbery and rape and murder. But your own child's suffering is different even if it is childishly overdrawn or imagined.

"I — I guess I fainted. I remember Ilse's wet cheek and her arms around me. She carried me back to bed and she kept saying over and over, 'My little Steffie. I'll write you. And you'll come to visit in my home. And you write me every week, everything that happens to my little Steffie. Promise —' But I wouldn't. And I wouldn't kiss her goodbye. I hated her mouth. And finally I screamed, 'Get out! I don't want any letters! I hate you! I hate you!'"

All the new poise was gone and I saw the little girl whose world had been knocked from under her. "My poor baby —"

But she wasn't ready to come into my arms. "That's why I couldn't get well. I wanted to be sick so Ilse would have to come back. I couldn't stand any of the others."

"Of course, honey. Because they weren't Ilse."

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"And because I'd cared for my mother and she was gone. I'd c-cared for Ilse and she — And so I couldn't bear to love anybody — not even you —"

I gathered her in then, and held her tight. I can't say the things I felt as my arms closed around the little girl who had been dosed with vitamins and iron when all she ever wanted was to feel safe inside. Maybe there are no words for them. But at last I said, "I guess it's my birthday too," and we both knew what I meant. "But you mustn't blame yourself, baby —"

"I know." She withdrew from the circle of my arm. "I know if Ilse were alive I'd have heard."

I didn't argue. But when they find themselves abandoned and their money gone, shame often keeps these poor women silent. "What happened Monday?"

She carried my coffee into the study and perched on the arm of my leather chair. "I saw him on 5th Street, coming out of a furniture store — first the ears and then — that face! He was with a stout woman with high cheekbones and I ran up to him and said, 'Mr. Meier! I'm Steffie Daniels! Where's Ilse?'

"He turned green and his eyes were terrible! A murderer's eyes! And then he smiled, a horrible sugary smile, and he said, 'I think you have me mixed. I am Jules Mohr and this is Mrs. Mohr.' And when I came to my senses they'd driven away in a cab."

"That was all? I mean, that was —?"

She looked down at me pityingly. "That was all. I couldn't get you, so I called Tante Fayga and she helped me bring the whole thing into my Conscious. And yesterday we went back to the furniture store, but the owner didn't know the Mohrs — they'd only priced a refrigerator. But they must have a house and you can trace him. Because he has to pay for what he did to Ilse! I'll never rest till he does!"

I explained as kindly as I could that Ilse's case, if it were one, was almost four years old. There was no complainant, no *corpus delicti* — no proof, even, that this was the same man.

"Johann Meier — Jules Mohr — And I couldn't forget that face! *Father* —"

"I'll tell Chief Petrie to keep an eye out. I'm sorry, darling, but you want to meet issues squarely? Well, there's no evidence against this man, as we understand evidence in a Court. A good attorney would make a monkey out of you and your identification —" A face glimpsed through a door crack by an admittedly hysterical child! "For God's sake, Steffie, for years you've been moping over this thing. Forget it and be the healthy, happy girl you have every right to be."

She remained beside me but I couldn't reach her. "I know you're disappointed, but I'm not the Superman they write about in fiction — just an overworked County Attorney

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who can't handle the load we already have on hand. Please don't let it spoil our birthday."

At last she said gently, almost condescendingly, "I've got to stop expecting you to be a story-book hero. You're my most favorite father and this is my most favorite birthday and my most most wonderful present. I'd like to show it to Tante Fayga because we had a bet on. And she's waiting for a piece of cake and I know you're dying to get at your brief."

I was but — "I'll drive you over to Maple Park."

She took my keys and dropped a kiss on the top of my decrepit old head. "If I run over anybody I'll tell them my father is the County Prosecutor."

I knew they would be cooking up something and I didn't want my girl mixed up in that kind of mess. But if I tangled with Mrs. Bendovid I'd come off a poor second. I always do. So I exacted Steffie's promise to let me know if they located "Mr. Meier," and told myself that ours is a large community, and a guilty man would skip out after being recognized. So the chances of making contact were one in a million. Still, it was an hour before I opened my briefcase. It's a disturbing experience to make the acquaintance of your only daughter. . . .

Maple Park used to be a medium-priced real estate development with blocks and blocks of undistinguished and undistinguishable little red brick houses. But that was before a little man with a naked upper lip played out a scene in one overfurnished living room, with fatal consequences for one of the actors. We have the data for reconstructing it almost verbatim, though no way of knowing his thoughts as he looked around at the solid symbols of German comfort.

"You have a lovely home, Mrs. Zwilling." (The corner druggist had told an inquiring stranger that Mrs. Brunnhilde Zwilling owned it free and clear.)

"Oh, thank you, it's small but whatever is in it is good. Too many people are all show on the outside, Mr. Mayer. *Oben hui, Unten pfui.*"

He smiled appreciatively, "Modesty is good, but from your letter I did not expect you would be so attractive, dear lady."

"I always say if you don't wear everything on your sleeve, people will be happy to get more than they expected." It wouldn't hurt if he saw she was no fool. "I believe in keeping things in the bank, Mr. Mayer, and not only money — although Mr. Zwilling, may he rest in peace, left me well provided. But if I'm a good cook, my *knoedel* will say it better than me."

"It is like a dream," he murmured, and there can be no doubt of his sincerity. Finally he sighed, "Loneliness is a terrible thing, dear lady."

The lady agreed, and said she had made up her mind, if she could meet the right kind of man —

"That is what we are here to find

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out, dear lady. We are not children —" He broke off to inquire whether Mrs. Zwilling had any children.

"Only a married stepdaughter in Tchicago." The answer seemed to please him. "I myself was not so blessed."

"Blessed or cursed, Mrs. Zwilling? To have them and lose them —!" She asked a muted question and his answer came in accents of controlled grief, out of his averted face. "A little girl of five. Burned to death. My wife too —" And ever since, he had wandered over the face of the earth.

She listened raptly as he described the cities he had seen. "You bring a breath of the whole world into this little room!" Mr. Zwilling, it appeared, had been a conservative man — a stick-to-what-you-have man. Every Tuesday he wanted the same *gedaempfte rindebrust* and every Thursday, *zwetchken knoedel*. A woman wants her cooking appreciated but — "I have always longed to see something of the world."

He shook his head philosophically. "That's life, dear lady. The person in the little house watches the trains go by. The one on the train watches the little houses go by." For years he had looked with envy at the home cooking on his friends' tables. It was at a friend's home that he had picked up the *Neue Post* and three little lines jumped out of the page. Three lines might change a man's fate!

The dear lady leaned forward in her chair. "You mean my — ad?"

He meant her loneliness crying out to his. "Do you believe in Fate, Mrs. Zwilling?"

Well, as a rule, she believed more in going after what you want. But maybe he was right. She wouldn't argue with him. Or he with her, it seemed. About anything.

The mounting crescendo of their harmony was jarred by three sharp rings on the back doorbell. Mr. Mayer started up. "Who's that?"

She hastened to reassure him. "Some neighbors saw a light, I suppose. I won't answer. You were saying?"

He seemed to have lost the thread. "Promise me, dear lady, that whatever passes between us remains between us. People laugh at lonely hearts."

What woman could refuse such a promise? "Why should I take the whole world in my confidence?" she inquired, and led the way into the dining room. It was not an outright lie, since one confidante, who had helped her compose the ad, was not the whole world. "Only a little snack," she explained modestly, putting a match to the gleaming candle sticks set on the real lace doilies, while her guest's eye traveled avidly over the canapes, the salad, the home-baked *mohn brodchen*, the *kugelhupf*.

And not only his eyes. "No — no more, dear lady, really, I am bursting. And not with food alone. With happiness. With hope — with — with —" But he rose without saying with what else.

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Her disappointment was obvious. "You're not running away, Mr. Mayer?"

If he stayed he would be pressing her, and she must feel absolutely sure she was acting of her own free will. Also, he must bring proof of his financial standing and his character. And also, she might not be willing to give up her charming home.

"Give it up?" Her warm brown eyes grew round.

Only for a different one, no more charming, a little larger perhaps. He took out a worn and creased snapshot. "You've never been to California?"

All her life she had wanted to see the garden spot of the world. "And your house is beautiful!"

It had been beautiful, before the fire. And it would be again, and that was where he hoped to taste her *zwetchken knoedel*. They grew right in the patio, the *zwetchken*. And avocados! And figs! He must get estimates at once on restoring both house and garden. "May I call a cab to take me to the airport?"

"The *airport*, Mr. Mayer? You're going *tonight?*"

"My plane leaves in an hour. I couldn't resist seeing you first. And so I came, I saw, I was conquered!" But a man must attend to his affairs. Or how could he offer real security to a beautiful woman? And he must see his attorney so that, whatever happened, his home and investments would not go to distant cousins.

If anything, her anxiety increased.

"But where can I reach you?"

"I will write from Los Angeles. If you are a little anxious, so much the better for me, dear lady."

"But — but — you come out of the blue and then you are gone! I must know where to find you!"

"On your doorstep — one week from today. Don't you trust me, dear lady?" He smiled his warm sweet smile, and she said that of course she trusted him. A man who offered so much and asked nothing in return. She too would see an attorney. Oh, no, not her regular attorney who was friendly with her stepdaughter and — Well, it was none of his business!

Mr. Mayer kissed her hand and assured her that no affairs could keep him longer than a week. But on the way to the airport he ordered the cab to turn back, and to lose the small coupe which seemed to be following them. Mr. Mayer's affairs — at least, his current ones — were apparently not in California at all. But an air-mailed letter posted from there advised dear Mrs. Zwilling that one current deal was consummated profitably, that he had another pending, and would bring along estimates for the house, which was crying for a woman's touch. Meanwhile, she might save time by getting her own affairs in order before the 24th.

It was on the 24th that I received a call from Police Chief Petrie. "You asked me to keep an eye out for a certain matter? Well, it's in my office now."

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I hurried across the Square and found him with a weeping woman dressed in black. "Mrs. Mohr thinks her husband has been kidnaped," said the Chief. I looked sharply from her plump form to her high cheekbones while she repeated, in a drained voice with a trace of German accent, how her bridegroom of two days had disappeared on the way to a furniture store.

"Jules stopped for cigars and I went ahead. I waited and waited —" He would never have kept her waiting five minutes — he was so considerate. But she had waited all day — phoning everywhere — friends, hospitals, police. And so she knew only one thing could have happened. "Gangsters saw me give him the $1500 in the bank, to pay for the furniture, and they followed him —"

"Your husband is a stocky man with a thick mustache?"

She was pitiful in her desperate, trusting eagerness. "He shaved it off but — you know him, Mr. Daniels? You heard something?"

"I've heard of your husband. Weren't you pricing furniture on 5th Street?"

A dull brick color came and went, leaving her face more deathly pale. "That was my sister. They were shopping for their — for his — Oh, my poor Pauline!" She dropped her head into her hands and I realized then that she was in mourning.

"Your sister and your husband were shopping for *whose* home?" I asked sharply and had to strain for her answer. "He wasn't my husband then. He was married to Pauline."

I am hardened to sordid stories, but this one touched a new low. The widowed sisters had kept house together in the home of the younger one, Mathilde. Pauline, living on the bounty of Mathilde, had answered a Personal Ad in the *Neue Post*. And "God had brought her Jules Mohr, a well-fixed man who had lost his wife and child in a fire." Mathilde wished that she, too, could find such a considerate companion, with such a sweet smile. But she was glad for Pauline —

"She was always so proud, although mine was hers, and nobody knew. Even Jules didn't know till after the wedding. Of course he has a much more beautiful home in California. Pauline couldn't wait to be in her own —"

She broke down completely. Poor Pauline never saw her new home. Right after the wedding dinner she was stricken with ptomaine —

The Chief sat up abruptly and began to scribble his hieroglyphic notes.

"The doctor did everything possible and Jules never left her bed. He was so good, so kind that I — I —" Before the funeral she had agreed to take her sister's place. "It was God's will, and Pauline would want the two who had loved her to console each other." They had slipped out of town for the ceremony, because people wouldn't understand how their grief had made them one! "But maybe I coveted my sister's

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husband," she sobbed, "and this is God's punishment —"

Petrie put a kindly hand on her bent shoulder. "Your sister had made out a will?"

She nodded. "Jules made out his to her and she — There wasn't much —" She raised her eyes and there was a different kind of fright in them and the beginning of a fearful question.

"You didn't make a will in his favor." I didn't ask it, I knew it.

The panic in her eyes gave way to pleading. "Oh, no, you mustn't think — If you only knew him!"

We didn't tell her how well we knew him. Or how lucky she was. She'd been through enough, and worse to come. Petrie promised, grimly, to find her husband. And when I left he was calling the Coroner.

Hurrying across the Square I figured the chances of keeping the exhumation out of the papers until we could get our hands on Mr. Mohr-Meier. I even thought of the million-to-one chance that Mrs. Bendovid had run across his trail.

She must have been startled at the warmth with which I dragged her out of a chair in the reception room and propelled her toward my office. I ate my crow quickly. "I hope you're here to tell me something, but I want to tell you first that you were right and Steffie was right and I wish to God I hadn't been such a mule. I could have saved a woman's life."

"What woman, Donnie?"

I told her briefly. "I know what that autopsy will show. And if I can lay my hands on him — if he hasn't skipped out of town —"

"Oh, no, Donnie. He couldn't get away. Just bring along somebody with handcuffs."

I was slow to get her full meaning. "You know where he is *right now?*"

"Not only where he is, but even what he's dreaming. That Mrs. Zwilling will sell her house and — that's where he is, at Mrs. Hilde Zwilling's."

"Well, for heaven's sake why didn't you say so!" I shouted to two of my men and we tore across the parking lot. "Where is this Mrs. Zwilling?"

"Oh, she's in Tchicago, but the house is on Maple Avenue. And don't drive so crazy, he won't get away." She settled back against the seat, bracing her feet on the dashboard. I didn't go through any red lights, but I wasn't waiting for them to cool.

"You see, Donnie, when you wouldn't do anything, we put an ad in the *Neue Post*. We got seven answers! One was from John Mayer and that sounded close enough. In the drug store they told him Mrs. Zwilling is well fixed, but they didn't tell him she's in Tchicago. So he came to see *me*. The mustache was gone but Steffie knew him."

"Steffie —?"

"She helped me write the ad and she was hiding upstairs all the time. When she got a good look at him, she gave me the signal — three rings."

"She promised to let me know if you located him."

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"But we didn't. I couldn't get his address and on the way to the airport, he gave her the slip. Although she drives very well for a beginner.

"Donnie, darling. In Europe they lead partisans at sixteen. I was sure he was hooked — I made the bait so high — and I had a letter from California. Somebody out there must post them for him. And today he called up and I told him I'll give him my answer with *zwetchken knoedel*. So he ate like a pig and I kept music playing, so he shouldn't notice he was falling asleep from the dope in the brandy sauce. It was a good stiff dose. He never even moved when she tied him in the chair."

"Not Steffie!"

"Who else? Who do you think is watching him now? Don't worry so. (a) He's doped; (b) he's tied up, but good; (c) he's locked in; and (d) she has your gun."

And that's how we found my little girl, in Mrs. Zwilling's foyer, her eyes as hard and bright as the steel of my Colt trained on the living room door. My men carried him out to the car and he never knew what hit him till he woke up in a cell. And meanwhile I had his Little Black Book.

You all know about that Little Black Book and how many of the fifty entries were willing to come forward when the case broke. Willing and able. Among those whose tragedies went unheard was an unidentified entry on the first page — I. S. $1300. But we can identify Ilse Schaeffer who had been so good to a little girl that she could find no peace until Ilse Schaeffer was avenged. And the man who had taken such precautions never to be seen and recognized was trapped by one little-girl glimpse through a crack in a door. And so it was really Ilse Schaeffer who fingered him from her grave.

He put on a great show in court, but the famous smile did not impress the housewives on the jury. It was said to be the best case ever built up by the County. But I am not too smug, knowing that the brightest jewel in my official crown was put there by the very mature young lady who is no longer my little girl and the unquenchably young old lady who is and is not my mother-in-law. God help the malefactor who is up against that combination!

'Q'

Watch EQ on TV

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

As you may recall from previous editorial comment, Viola Brothers Shore teaches a course in Advanced Short Story Writing at New York University. Well, a strange — indeed, an extraordinary — thing happened in last year's contest: no less than three people connected with Miss Shore's class won prizes in EQMM's Sixth Annual Contest! Viola Brothers Shore herself won a Second Prize, and two of her pupils won special awards for first-published stories.

In this issue we bring you Miss Shore's prize-winning story, and a "first" story by Lisa Robineau — the best "first story," in your Editors' opinion, submitted last year. The other "first story"— Guy de Vry's "Vertigo"— will appear in EQMM later this year.

We thought Lisa Robineau's "Perchance to Dream" an amazingly perceptive and sensitive story to be written by a beginner; only a woman could have penetrated so deeply into the character of Lydia, and only a woman, it seems to us, could have projected Lydia in words. When the story was read aloud in Miss Shore's workshop, one of the other pupils remarked to the author: "You really believe in your characters, don't you?" That was sharp, shrewd critical opinion: Miss Robineau had to live *Lydia in order to conceive her and bring her to life . . .*

Lisa Robineau was born "enough years ago to know better than to tell you which year." Her mother, Adelaide Alsop Robineau, was considered the greatest ceramist in America and the greatest woman ceramist in the world. Lisa herself has had an interesting and promising artistic career: at the age of seven she was a sculptress; at thirteen, a violinist; then, an illustrator and costume designer; in her late teens, a concert dancer; at twenty-three, an actress. The tragic death of her mother forced Lisa to earn a living quickly — she became a dancing teacher at Arthur Murray's in New York, and this in turn started her on a thirteen-year professional career as half of a dance team called "Wes Adams and Lisa." They performed all over the world, mainly in Europe, Canada, and Cuba, and wherever they tripped the light fantastic, revolutions broke out (not caused by their dancing, needless to say): three in Cuba alone, and in Spain they escaped only with the clothes on their backs and their music.

September 1, 1939 found them still in Europe, and it took them three months to get home — slow motion from Paris to Copenhagen to Oslo to New York. After that, in rapid motion: marriage, eventual dissolution

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of the act, three years in the Canadian Army, re-establishment of the team but this time as professional photographers, and finally the realization of a deep yen to become a writer. She enrolled in Vi Shore's class because she (and we now quote Miss Robineau) "thought she had interesting background material for stories." And indeed she has — the background, the desire, the will — and most important, the talent. True, she has (again in her own words) "been disappointed, discouraged, disillusioned" — but in those emotions too are the seeds of creative material. And Lisa Robineau, we predict, will nurture those seeds to full florescence . . .

PERCHANCE TO DREAM

by LISA ROBINEAU

THERE WAS NO SOUND in the room save the ticking of the clock. The sun shone obliquely through the front window making rainbows in the goldfish bowl. Dinah, the cat, arched her back against the half-open door, and with a soft cry, padded to the window, jumping lightly up.

Lydia lay quietly, wondering how long she had been there. Sometimes the days folded into each other until she couldn't remember which was which. Bill would be annoyed if she couldn't remember what day it was, and she would feel guilty — angry too, because the drops in the little bottle always made her vague and unremembering. She didn't like the drops, nor the way he smiled when he gave them to her, saying, "They're good for you."

Lydia frowned at the clock, and her eyes went regretfully to the little desk at the far side of the window. Sunlight slid down the telephone's gentle black curve, glanced at the embossed silver inkwell, bounced sharply up from the steel of the paperknife, and came to rest on her own pretty clock. Bill had stopped the gracious Dresden piece that sat like a good-humored spinster caring not a whit for accuracy, and substituted this ugly, round, white face with its yellow, brass rim. The noisy clatter never ceased — but it did keep time.

It said eight, so Lydia knew it was morning. She had slept all through the night and the dream had not come.

Her mind skittered, and raced off to find something safer to think about. Yesterday she had gone downstairs. She was somehow quite sure it was yesterday. She had sat on the terrace in the hot afternoon shade. Bill had brought pillows and been upset because, he said, it wasn't good for her. But she had felt well — so well that even when he told her she looked tired, she insisted on staying, and

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stubbornly ignored the weariness that settled suddenly on her.

Charles came racing up from the beach, his ten-year-old body shining with salt water and sun. "Mum! Hey — you're downstairs!" He flung himself dripping against her. She hugged the slim, growing-up body, feeling her love like a deep wave as she kissed the bronzed face, bittersweet reminder of that other Charles.

Bill yanked the boy's shoulder. "Charles!" he said, "haven't you any sense?"

"Please," Lydia said, drawing her robe over the wet place. "It doesn't matter. I see him so seldom."

Bill's broad shoulders shrugged. He grunted. "Then, for pity's sake, Charles, be careful. Don't fidget."

"*O*-kay!" Charles plumped himself down, cross-legged.

It wasn't a look, it was more a sense of dislike that passed between them, and Lydia felt again the little demons of doubt prickling under her scalp. Surely, it never used to be like this? Surely, surely, Bill cared for Charles as if he were his own child?

Lydia was suddenly aware of her legs strained tight in the bed sheets, and she closed her eyes against the sunshine that was too bright, thinking — doesn't he? It was her imagination, wasn't it, that made her see something deeper than dislike, quickly hidden when Bill looked at his stepson?

She was horrified at the involuntary thought — *Bill wouldn't dare to harm my child. I would kill him if he did* — How could she have such a thought? This kind husband, who had found her when she was helpless and alone with her child — she had only gratitude and affection for him. Not until the day the grinning man had come — now, why could she never remember his name? No matter — on that day, fear had come, and the dream had begun.

Again Lydia's mind shied in fright, and she turned it deliberately back to the September sunshine of the day before.

So pleasant, the three of them together, chatting about nothing, while sea gulls coasted on long blue slopes, and below on the beach she could see the skimming specks — the sandpipers, darting and pecking, darting and pecking.

And suddenly Bill had said, "While I think of it, Lydia, you'd better sign those papers for the transfer of stock — the ones Mr. Ward advised you on, yesterday."

"What stock? Mr. Ward didn't come yesterday."

Bill patted her cheek patiently. "Poor lamb, you've forgotten again. It's that big block of Amalgamated. Mr. Ward drove out especially from New York."

A thin screech made Lydia jump. Charles grinned over the blade of grass stretched tight between his thumbs and said, "He didn't come yesterday."

Bill said sharply, "You'd better leave if you're going to make noises like that."

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Charles dropped the green blade. "*O*-kay," he said disgustedly. "But anyway, Mr. Ward didn't come yesterday. I was fixing my bike in the drive all afternoon, and he didn't come."

Silence stretched between them. And Bill clipped it. "Came in the morning! — it doesn't concern you, anyway."

Lydia looked, bewildered, from her son to her husband, and seemed to hear the sound of wind blowing through grass. But the day was still — and hot, very hot.

"Hey! Mum," Charles said suddenly, "Mrs. Hall says for sure she's going to stay here all winter, too. So maybe —"

His bright face was turning too many times, too quickly, from her to Bill, and Lydia wanted to push down the rustling grass because this was important. "Oh, Charles, darling, how wonderful!" she said, and they both looked at Bill.

"What's this about Mrs. Hall?" His light lashes dropped, startling white on his brown cheeks. He was smiling, and in her hope the wind and the grass and everything paused, waiting. Charles's eager voice explained.

"Well, if she stays, can't I tutor with her, huh? Can't I? And not go away to school?"

The lashes came up and the smile was gone. "Nonsense. It's been decided."

"It's not!" Lydia was angry — so angry she was up and out of her chair. It *hasn't* been decided!"

"*Lydia!*"

His shout paralyzed her. For a silent instant they looked, Lydia thought, as if they'd been stopped, the three of them, in a game of "living statues" — Bill holding her wrists, Charles sprawled back on his hands, his mouth open.

"What?" she said dazedly.

The tension broke. "Nothing," Bill said. He smiled, a strange smile, and reached with great care to move a pair of pruning shears to the far side of the garden table. "I was afraid you might —" He paused. " I was mistaken."

Charles's snub nose wrinkled in frank bewilderment. "She wasn't doing anything."

"No — of course not." Bill's muscular hand tousled the boy's hair. "That's right, Charles. We mustn't startle Mummy. It's bad for her."

But the puzzle stayed on Charles's face. "She wasn't startled," he said. "Until you grabbed her." . . .

Lydia snuggled deep into her big comfortable bed. You see, she thought proudly, I do remember.

She wished Bill would come in, so she could tell him how well she remembered all of yesterday afternoon. She even remembered that after she had signed the papers and Bill had brought her back to bed, he'd made her take some more drops out of the little bottle, saying gently, "They're good for you."

If she could remember all that, it must prove — Lydia was feeling drowsy — it must prove something

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or other. She had taken the drops and — wait! There was something else she should remember. What was it?

She moved her head and saw it — right there beside the clock where he'd left it when the phone rang. The little bottle.

Without thinking why, Lydia's fingers worked at the place inside the pillow slip where the seam was split. Carefully she put the bottle inside, pushing it deep into the feathers.

She looked back at the clock and made a face at it — hateful watcher. It somehow always reminded her of that dreadfully efficient woman who had stayed for a while — that nurse, Miss Cotter.

She smiled, feeling she'd played a good joke on them all — the spying clock and Miss Cotter — and Bill too.

The drops were safe. She could take them if she wanted, and probably they were good for her. She had slept all through the night and the dream had not come.

She sighed wearily. The dream. One way or another, the dream always found its way in. No matter what happened first, or came after — the dream was always lurking, always the same.

The weariness settled, creeping over her legs and even into her fingertips. I can't escape it, she thought, because I never know when it has begun.

Such an ordinary beginning. A bright autumn morning — just such a day as this. And the room — always this familiar room.

Lydia moved restlessly against the pillows and frowned at the shimmering brightness. "I mustn't think of it." Her lips formed the words and they fell back, silent, into thought. A dream is only a dream, and I am awake now. I must go down to the breakfast table, pour the coffee for Bill and see that my Charles drinks all his milk. And I mustn't think there is something hidden in the way Bill looks at Charles. That is only the dream — the dream that came with the grinning man.

Her fingers pushed through her hair, spreading the long, loose strands on the pillow. Why am I afraid? She groped for a half-remembered answer. Not for myself. If I died today it wouldn't matter, except for the pain of leaving *him* — of never again touching his smooth young head — never again kissing his bright face. Charles is my life. For him I must not be afraid. All my life is waiting for me — downstairs.

She felt the compulsion that urged her up, against the drowsiness, away from the softness of pillows.

I am not sick, she thought irritably. I am only tired. Tired from this empty, meaningless struggle . . .

The floor had a cool, airy feeling under her feet — she scarcely seemed to touch it. A warm breeze came from the west window — the west window where the garden ended, and the lawn sloped down to meet the waters of the Sound.

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The golden light of an Indian summer morning hung over the garden. The distance quivered in a haze of heat. She put her hands on the sill, leaning out to watch a small bird.

How strange, she thought — strange that a sandpiper should be here on the lawn, instead of down on the beach where he belongs.

She felt her heart begin to tick in her throat. . . . The west window and the glow of morning sunshine. Blue haze distorting the distance — a sandpiper on the lawn. . . . She leaned on the sill, her fingernails digging into the soft wood — and she knew she was waiting.

I can't help it — the words were fast-running notes, slipping like beads on a thread through her brain — I am waiting for the *thump* that will tell me Dinah the cat has leaped from the rickety little table that stands in the front window — the window that looks directly toward the Sound. I have to wait for the *thump*. Dinah will jump, and the fishbowl on the table will begin to rock dangerously. Turn quickly, three long steps, and catch the bowl before it falls —

No! Don't do it. Let the fishbowl fall. Let it break — break the sequence, the pitiless sequence I have followed — how many times? *Let it break!*

Thump!

Her fingers caught the bowl just as water slopped over the edge. She stared down at the fish racing in circles, round and round in senseless circles, their mouths gaping in stupid imitation of her own breathlessness.

I will watch these silly, golden bodies in their aimless darting, she said to herself — I will watch them, until I hear the shout. Then I will raise my head to look through the window — and the horror will start.

She accepted it with the hopelessness of remembered acceptance, knowing she must go on now to the predestined finish. With dread blurring her eyes, she held to the fishbowl and waited.

She heard the shout, and her eyes were compelled from the gleaming bowl to the broad pane of the window.

Yes, it is Bill. He is racing into the water, and it slaps against his shirt, drenching him. He will turn — yes. And beckon wildly to the two men running up the beach. Now he points toward the dark shape out in the deeper water.

She knew it so well. How many times had she been forced to watch each remembered action, knowing before they even reached it, the identity of that shape rocked by the gentle swell. Why could she not have just a moment — the respite of uncertainty — why did she have to *know*?

The stairs rocked under her feet, the door stuck — as she had known it would, though it had never stuck before. And she fell at its sudden opening.

Vines, bushes, sprang from nowhere to trap her. The rhododendron hedge was never so thick. . . . She fought the nightmare of immobility

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— the baffling struggle to go forward — to get through to the beach. And the sand, sucking at each foot, trapped her again. She heard the screaming, and knew it was her own.

And now, the men — holding her. Her husband, his face an empty whiteness, telling her to go back.

Her words shouted, soundless, in her ears. Fools. Idiots. Don't you realize that I know? That I knew before you did — that this crumpled smallness of human flesh would be my son? The only thing that is mine, that I love. From the ghastly beginning I have known it.

And known, too, that a mother's natural grief would be denied me. For this is not the natural death of a child caught by an unexpected wave. No water seeps from this poor mouth. There's no room with the swollen tongue that fills it. The eyes stare, and around the small throat the necktie is knotted so tight —

The necktie that, dark and stringy, was still the one she had given Bill for his birthday.

She fought his restraining arms, tore with abhorrence at the hands that pretended to comfort. *Murderer!* But he was strong and his arms secure. She heard his voice, loud, but far away. . . .

"*Wake up!*" and as her eyes opened, he smiled. A smile that was half a frown. "Poor darling. Another one of those dreams?"

"Oh, Bill, Bill!" She clung to him, relief bringing tears. She looked around, caressing with her eyes each familiar object in this familiar room, shaken by her gratitude for the morning sunshine streaming across the coverlet, the homely ticking of the clock on the bedtable.

The hour shocked her. "It's late!" she said. "How could I sleep so late?"

She remembered she had been awake earlier. Or was that, too, a part of the dream? How could she tell? How was she to know that she was not still dreaming?

She shivered, and his hands pushed her back, strong, persistent, the pillows folding up around her.

". . . easy, darling." His voice broke the dizziness. "I heard you thrashing about, and came running."

He smiled, and it was clear again. This was Bill, her husband who loved her. This was real.

She put her hands in his, and saw only the fringe of his lashes, white on tan cheeks, and his blond sunburned hair.

And then he looked up — the sharp pale blue look that prodded. "Was it a bad one, Lydia?"

She nodded.

"What was it about?" The eyes watched, curious.

She shook her head. "I don't remember." She had never told him. Not even when, sometimes, his voice held sympathy instead of this tacit speculation.

His white teeth made a mark in the lower lip. "Too bad," he said, smiling, "but I'm glad you awakened in time."

"In time for what?" she said, and

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fear prickled vaguely along her spine.

"In time to say goodbye to Charles."

She started from the pillows. "What's happened? Where is he? What —?"

"Nothing's happened," Bill said impatiently. "He's down on the beach as usual. But this is his last morning."

It seemed to her that something dark passed across his face, and for a moment the room wavered as if a giant hand had shaken it. She looked at the brown skin of his throat in the open shirt — tieless — and suddenly, everything was very quiet.

"Why?"

"Good heavens, Lydia!" His voice was sharp. "Can't you remember anything? He's going to stay with the Phillipses until his school opens."

Her mind searched frantically. "You didn't tell me."

"Poor child." He smiled, his thin smile, and patted her cheek. "It's getting worse, isn't it? Do try to remember. Dr. Hyde insists it's the only thing to do. We'll visit Charles at school — if you get better."

"But why, Bill, why?" Dazed, she reached inside her for Charles — to keep him with her.

Bill held her out, smiling as if she were a little girl. "Because you're such a stubborn minx. If you insist on staying here, instead of going into a — hospital — the way Dr. Hyde wants you to — then Charles has got to go."

She put her face in her hands, bewildered, confused. Had she said she wouldn't go into a hospital? Had she? She didn't know — she couldn't remember. So many things that Bill said she had forgotten. And now, when it was so important, her memory flew, hovering just out of reach. Surely, this, she should remember?

Doubt grappled with a monstrous fear. How could things go into her mind and leave it without a trace?

Bill's eyes were cool, confident, and hers were timid. "Suppose I do want to stay here, in my own home," she said, and grasped at a thin remembrance that floated close, "there's Mrs. Hall to teach him. Why does Charles have to go?"

His smile was getting forced. "Because Dr. Hyde thinks it would be safer — for Charles."

She stared at him, and suddenly the horror of what he had said took her out of bed and onto her knees beside him. "You think I'd *hurt* him?" she whispered. "You can't — you don't think I'd hurt him!" In her head demons of anger awoke — "You think I'm crazy!" she said harshly. "All right! Think anything you want, but not — not that I'd hurt my baby!"

He took her head, his fingers in her long, tumbled hair, and his words were smooth. "Now, Lydia, take it easy. Remember Dr. Hyde's warning. Any sudden emotional upset might be — dangerous."

Take it easy, Lydia thought bitterly — take the demons and the shame and the fright, take them easy? She looked at him and wondered if people smiled when they were con-

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cerned. Because Bill was smiling.

"No one said you were crazy," he went on. "But think back — well, try to, anyway" — the smile made her feel like a child, and his fingers hurt in her hair, straining her neck — "You've done some very strange things recently."

"What?" she pleaded. "Tell me."

But his voice, close and soft, ignored her. "This is just a precaution. It will be something for you to work toward — but Charles certainly can't be with you now. You haven't been very cooperative, Lydia. I don't know —"

He looked beyond her, and she was frightened. A swirling white fog turned and pushed in her head, clearing — and rolling in again.

What did he mean — cooperative? She'd been very nice to this man he'd brought, politely explaining she was only tired, that perhaps she needed a tonic. Bill had kept silent — there had not been the slightest hint of odd things done. But when she avoided her dream so cleverly, insisting that everyone had nightmares once in a while, a secret look had passed between them, and Bill had arched his eyebrows and shrugged.

"I don't know," Bill said again. Lydia didn't like his smile and she didn't want to listen to him, but she had to — his hands were holding her face, his fingers in her hair. "We'll try it anyway. Miss Cotter is coming to stay — you like her, don't you? We'll try, but perhaps — you will have to go —"

The thing on his face was not really a smile. He added, "For a while," but his sure hands brought her hair forward around her throat, and Lydia, who had thought she would not care if she died, was suddenly filled with fear for her life.

The fog in her head rolled back, piling high like a great wall, and she could remember now all the things that were important.

It was important that Bill was a stranger — a stranger who had come because of money. Lots of money and papers that she hadn't known what to do about. Come in that dreadful time when suddenly — overnight — she was no longer a wife, but a widow.

He had come when there was no one left for her but young Charles. And he'd done things about all the money and papers. She'd only had to sign her name when he told her. That was kind — so kind of him. It was as if a great confusion had been lifted, leaving her free to think about the happy time before.

It was important that he was kind, so important that she had married him. She was cared for, as she had always been cared for — perhaps even more. He listened when she told him about the pain in her legs and her headaches. Listened, and reminded her when sometimes life and excitement came bubbling up, and she thought she might do more than she was able. If he hadn't been so thoughtful she might not have noticed the pain that was always hidden there.

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Lydia twisted back, away from the pull of her hair and the hideous little demons nibbling under her scalp. She must not forget that Bill was cross with Charles. He shouted at him and scolded, even when he knew it always ended with long hours for her in bed in a darkened room.

Bill hated Charles. This was the most important of all. This was what brought the fear, she suddenly remembered, and now she was glad that at last it was all so clear.

Bill's hand slid down and around her waist. "But we mustn't look on the dark side, must we, Lydia? Dr. Hyde's the best in his line. Perhaps you won't have to go away."

Lydia's smile was sly against his shirt. Oh, yes, she would — so far she could never come back — if Dr. Hyde had his way. It was coming so clear now. The long nose, the little eyes bright under the bushy brows —

Hyde was no doctor. He was that man — what was his name? — who had grinned over his whisky in the firelight, and said, "Better keep your eye on Bill, Lydia. It's a hell of a temptation." He'd rumpled Charles's hair and laughed uproariously. "And only one small heir to get rid of. Perfect set-up. Yes, you'd better watch out!"

Bill had laughed, but he'd been angry too, and said later the man was a boor. She had sat quiet, and watched the little pointed imps jump in the embers.

That night the dream had come for the first time. And when she'd tried to watch out, there'd been arguments, and then quarrels about the papers and the money, and Bill had said she was sick and couldn't remember things, and didn't understand.

But she'd understood well enough — the speculation in his eyes when he looked at Charles.

And now, the grinning man had returned — and was bringing his confederate —

Lydia's nerves pricked behind her ears. Miss Cotter had come already! She sat on the bedtable, her round white face with its thin rim of yellow hair, staring busily. Busy, busy, busy — time for this — time for that —

Silly, Lydia thought crossly — that's the clock.

Bill was watching her, his eyes slitted in that speculative, hidden look. It was Bill who had introduced the grinning man. Every time, it was Bill who let him in! Why hadn't she thought of that before?

She pushed up from her knees, stumbling a little. She mustn't let him see that she knew. She must speak very calmly.

"There's plenty of time, Bill. I — I think I'll take Charles abroad this fall."

Bill's voice was sharp. "Lydia!" — and his sigh was irritated. "I'm sorry, Lydia. I'm afraid you're — not well enough to make decisions. Charles goes to the Phillipses today."

She walked across the floor, feeling ridiculously light on her feet. Her head was clear, her thoughts marching in a neat, orderly row. She had been

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stupid not to understand before. He was going to cut her child out of her body — get rid of him. That done, her own time would come. How, she didn't know. Perhaps Hyde would shut her up in a dark place with her dream. Perhaps —

She thought of Bill's hands and thrust her hair back from her neck, shivering. Charles was the most important. What happened to her was not important at all.

Her thoughts fell into line again, and she saw with sudden relief how simple it would be.

She had only to get this money — that was hers — into her own hands. Then she would refuse to pay the grinning man who pretended to be a doctor, and he would have to go away, and take the clock with him. And she wouldn't pay Bill either, and he'd have to go too. So she would be free of them all — and Charles would be safe.

She leaned back against the desk and felt the sharp corner dig in her thigh. But she didn't dare to move or look up, because then Miss Cotter on the bedtable would see her and guess.

She reached behind for support. The inkwell moved, nudged by her fingers, and there was something cold under her hand — something thin and cold as death, and she trembled with fear. But beside the other she felt the telephone, and she said:

"Bill, I want to see Mr. Ward."

Bill's voice was very quiet. "Why?"

She felt little bursting bubbles of excitement. This was rather like doing a magician's trick. You made one move, obviously, so the real one would not be noticed.

She hunted for the misleading move, and wanted to laugh as she found it. "To give him the little bottle, Bill. You're so stuffy about what's in it. I'll get him to tell me."

His eyes flicked to the bedtable — where the bottle had been. "Where did you put it, Lydia?"

She giggled. This was fun — a game. "I'll bet you can't find it," she said.

She held her breath as he stood there, his pale eyes touching everything in the room. He took a step toward the bathroom.

She shook her head and said teasingly, "Un-unh — you're getting colder."

He stopped still, and smiling she picked up the phone. She was proud of herself — outwitting him so cleverly. Poor Bill. She would drop a little hint. "I'll tell Mr. Ward about those papers I signed yesterday. He can take them when he comes. And I'll —" she giggled again. Really this was too good to keep to herself — "I'll ask him about the Phillipses. They might be kidnapers, you know."

A disembodied voice said, "Number, please." Lydia said, "Murray Hill 4 —" and then her heart seemed to stop.

Somehow, somewhere, she'd made a mistake — a terrible mistake!

Bill was looking at her, and something in his face filled her with horror. "Put down the phone, Lydia."

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But it stayed, glued to her hand, and faintly she heard the irritated voice. "*Number*, please."

He was coming toward her, soft and stealthy.

"What number do you want, please?"

The ghost voice was, vaguely, out of place. It didn't belong here in this moment that was suddenly like the dream. Like the dream — for with the awful remembered acceptance of the dream — she knew. She *knew* —

He came quietly, steadily. "It's too bad, Lydia. I didn't want it this way."

She waited — as she knew she must — seeing each detail of the room sharp with unreality. The vivid gold of sunshine, the blackness of Dinah arched over the fishbowl, the last tipped inch of her tail twitching. The thin cheep of the phone that suddenly stopped.

She was helpless — as in the dream — and his hands on her head slipped down, pressing the long, thick hair against her neck.

It *was* the dream! In the blurring brightness of the room, she was Charles and her hair a long, dark necktie.

Now, strangely, she seemed to stand apart and see them both. Bill's hands held the necktie, crossed and tight, and her baby's eyes were staring, his mouth coming open as he fought — fought for breath . . .

But the breath would not come, and her hands struggled on the top of the desk. The inkwell crashed. The breath would not come. The brightness was going — fast! — she must hurry if Charles was to be saved. Charles was the most important . . . the most important . . .

Thump!

Four black feet hit the floor, and the rickety little table in the front window began to rock dangerously. Dinah the cat stared with green glass eyes, and the hackles stood straight on her back. Soundlessly, Dinah spat.

But Lydia lay quiet, the strong dark hair coiled around her throat. Her hand opened, slowly, and slid down Bill's crumpled body, trailing a smear of blood from the steel paperknife, hilt-deep in his back. Slid down, and rested there, between them.

The fishbowl tottered, crashed. Water splashed on Lydia's face. Goldfish flapped defenseless on the floor. Her hand jerked up and fell again, touching the broken pieces.

Floating in on the sunshine came the laughter of a boy, and Lydia's eyelids fluttered. Fluttered, and gently opened. . . .

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We described the first story by L. J. Beeston that we brought to you — "The Pipe," in our June 1951 issue — as an adventure in the classic tradition of twist-and-turn ingenuity, sparkling imagination, and edge-of-your-seat suspense. The second story by Mr. Beeston is not as ingenious or as creatively imaginative as the first, but it offers a full measure of nail-biting suspense. The simple truth is, L. J. Beeston can tell a complete story in a single scene, and pack that one scene with all the melodrama and excitement of a full novelette. Yes, we said melodrama. . . .

It is incredible that L. J. Beeston, a born storyteller, who writes with good old-fashioned gusto and in a ripping, rippling, riproarious style — a writer who has produced nearly a thousand short stories — yes, nearly a thousand! — should be virtually unknown to American readers. True, despite his enormous output, Mr. Beeston has had few of his tales published in book form — so far, we have been able to track down only two volumes. Yet his fame has spread beyond his native England. Only a short time ago we received a letter from Edogawa Rampo, the dean of Japanese detective-story writers, and were amazed to learn that L. J. Beeston is well-known to Japanese mystery fans; and yet, in all the correspondence we have had with British aficionados, never once has an English critic or historian even mentioned the name of L. J. Beeston! Truly, a practitioner is without honor in his own country. . . .

We hereby give you fair warning: EQMM will publish more of Mr. Beeston's stories. Your Editors like this man's zest and vitality.

VOLTURIO INVESTIGATES

by L. J. BEESTON

LINEGAR impatiently waved away the smoke floating from Williams' cigar. "Volturio is late," said he, worriedly. "Nearly fifteen minutes late. I don't like it."

"Twelve, to be precise," corrected Brodie. "He will come. I say, it's infernally cold in this infernal office." He lunged with a foot at a chunk of coal in the open grate. "The caretaker won't like a fire burning so late, though. A pity that Volturio fixed our meeting here for ten o'clock."

Linegar held up a hand. "Listen! I think I hear him," he announced.

Brodie paused with his right heel suspended over the fireplace; Linegar kept his palm raised; Williams twisted

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his head round towards the door.

The three men were in a large office at the top of a building in the neighborhood of Tower Hill. In the centre was a long desk, with a double rail above it, and three leather-topped stools on both sides. There was a roll-top desk in a corner, an old-fashioned copying-press in another, and a telephone against the wall. The window overlooked a tiny quadrangle formed by a building at the back, and others on each side. This well was an absolutely black hole just now, the hour being late. The hundred and seventeen stairs, all of stone, with an iron rail, that went down to the basement, passed three landings below the top one, where other offices were grouped. The tenants of these had gone home some time ago, and the caretaker and his wife were already sweeping out.

The office where the three men waited for a fourth bore on its door, which was half-mahogany and half-frosted glass, the inscription: *Brodie & Co., General Merchants.*

"You are right," said Williams, after a pause. "Here comes Volturio."

A strong hand grasped the door handle, and a man entered. He threw a keen look round. "Good," said he; "we are all here. I was detained a few minutes."

He spoke without apology. He spoke masterfully. He did not look like a man who ever apologized. The short, thick topcoat upon his broad shoulders glistened with rain. He removed his hard-felt hat and shook the wet from it.

"There's water enough outside to drown a shark," said he.

The three men did not answer, and each kept his eyes upon the newcomer. When the latter had taken off his saturated coat he seized a small and rather rickety table by the side of the copying-press and carried it to the space between the long office desk and the fire.

"There!" said he, setting it down. "Suppose we all sit round this table while we hold our conference? It makes a warm place; we can use it for our notes and papers; and being close together we can pitch our voices low. Draw up!"

"It's quiet enough here, though," said Linegar. "There are only the caretakers left on the premises."

He had a queer habit, after speaking, of sniffing and blinking his eyes.

"What's the news, Volturio?" questioned Brodie, taking off his round spectacles and rubbing the lenses with his handkerchief.

"I can see Volturio has something," said Williams, picking a fragment from the chewed end of his cigar.

"That's as true as — as that our inscription of *General Merchants* on the door is the other thing, being a blind to cover our real affairs," answered Volturio. "First, we will take the business that has brought us all here: the Duchess of Claypool's diamonds. Her Grace will be at the Dover Street Ball tomorrow night, and she will glisten with almost every jewel she owns. To that end I worked hard, being almost responsible for the

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ball! Our scheme for those jewels is good. It scintillates more than the stones. The urgent summons calling her away; the mishap to her car en route, our ready-and-waiting taxi — all so simple, but with every angle and rough edge polished away by our united intelligences. The main scheme, as usual, was created by Skarrs, whom we acknowledge the centre of our little system, the best brains in Brodie and Co., very general merchants. To each one of us was allotted his part. Now we are met, our plans, I take it, perfected, to cast a final look round, and to examine every risk under a mental microscope."

"You can talk, Volturio," said Linegar. He sniffed and he blinked.

"We have had our chat before you came," said Williams. "All seems in order."

Volturio leaned back, a rather terrible smile lifting his little black mustache.

"Seems?" he echoed. "Yes, seems is the word. As a matter of fact, our idea has exploded like a fire-ball in a dark night; and that isn't the worst, either."

In the tense silence that followed he produced a slip of paper. "The message on this is in cipher," said he. "Skarrs's cipher, and from him to me. Brodie, read it and pass it on."

Brodie read. It took him less than a minute.

"Blast it!" he spluttered.

During that minute, Volturio, leaning forward, had fixed upon Brodie a look as searching as if he had been trying to see the very soul in him. He said, quietly: "Pass it to Linegar."

Brodie obeyed. He removed his spectacles and rubbed them hard.

Linegar ran his eyes over the cryptic lines. He threw up his head, pierced with astonishment, and saw Volturio peering at him as he had peered at Brodie.

"A hellish mistake! I'll swear it's a mistake!" exclaimed Linegar.

"Your turn, Williams," said Volturio, and this time his boring eyes settled upon the third man in a gaze of the most burning scrutiny.

Williams read. An angry flush surged into his face; he lifted a clenched fist as if to smash the table, then relaxed.

"If Skarrs says it is so, it is so, I suppose," he remarked, quietly. He pulled off another wet strip from his cigar.

Volturio crossed his arms upon the table's edge. "I got that message from Skarrs half an hour ago," he said, speaking with deliberation. "I see that it is perfectly intelligible to us all. Skarrs informs us that one of us has gone over to the police. He says, as you see, that he had no time to put his suspicions and inquiries into his cipher-note. He just says that he is absolutely certain. Skarrs never talks like that unless the thing *is*. Hurriedly he puts us on our defense. He thinks he can ascertain the name of the spy in our midst, but has no clear data at present. He warns us, I say. That is worthy of Skarrs. We feel obliged; that is to say, *three* of us feel

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very much obliged to Skarrs. It appears, therefore, that three of us are on the edge of a precipice. That is an unendurable state of affairs. The scheme which assembled us here is off, of course. The Duchess of Claypool can keep her diamonds — that has become minor. We have to deal with a far more serious matter, gentlemen. Tonight, here, in this room, we have got to probe to the evil — and kill it! That is clear?"

"Daylight clear," said Brodie. He took off his spectacles.

"Imperative, absolutely," agreed Linegar. He sniffed and he blinked.

"Give us a lead, Volturio," said Williams, tearing at his ragged cigar.

Slowly, deliberately, Volturio turned his face from one man to another and back again. "It's not going to be easy," said he. "One of us, sitting here, has gone over to the police, either to save his vile hide, or for money. That one is a spy. The question is — which one? Linegar, is it you?"

"It certainly is not."

"Williams, is it you?"

"No, Volturio."

"Brodie, are you the scum?"

"Emphatically — no."

"There remains myself," continued Volturio, in a tone of deep gloom. "I think you can rule me out. If I was the traitor I should scarcely have laid the cards on the table, you will admit."

"Allowed," said Linegar.

"Obviously you would have kept quiet," agreed Williams.

"You are cleared, Volturio," said Brodie.

"All right. That leaves the three of you. Better, but still hard. One thing shines in an arc-light of certainty: it is that we are going to have our revenge. We must not let the spy among us leave this room tonight. How much he has told the police we do not know. By silencing him we may ease our danger, or we may greatly increase it. But we will have our measure of vengeance. We will find him, here and now; we will put a pistol ball in his heart; and then we will drop what is left of him out of the window? Are you all with me?"

They were, and they said so.

"We may stay here all night; all tomorrow; but we will not leave this place before settling our account. If we do, we lose our chance. In making this disclosure I have given the alarm to our spy. That could not be avoided. Yet it is so much the better, for it compels us to act — at once!"

As Volturio finished speaking he thrust a hand into a side-pocket and brought out a revolver with a long, blue-steel barrel. The deadly-looking thing he placed on the table before him, putting his big hands over it. Three pairs of eyes, fixed gloomily and apprehensively upon him, watched his movements, then traveled again to his stern, set face.

A long pause ensued. They all looked steadily at Volturio. They wanted a lead. In a tense, deep silence they waited. All they heard was the dull fall of the rain in the night.

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Presently Williams ventured a remark. He said: "Are you keeping anything up your sleeve, Volturio?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Are you possessed of even a shred of information which would help us in this inquiry?"

"Not the veriest shred. All I know is what you have read for yourself in Skarrs's note there."

"Then how shall we make a start?"

"I'll begin. First, Williams, we will take yourself. Have *you* betrayed us? Are *you* the spy in our midst? Is it *your* light that must be put out before we quit this place? You must stand up to the question. Now, you have an argument in your favor: you have already spent a year or two in jail — in an Indiana penitentiary."

"You reckon that in his favor?" queried Brodie.

"I think so."

"Why?" demanded Linegar.

"Because, having gone through the flames once, he might not be so nervous of arrest as one who had not already faced the music. And then the police might not accept, as a spy, the services of a man who had been convicted. I do not say they would not, only that they might not. We will turn to you, Linegar."

"All right; go ahead." He sniffed and blinked rapidly.

"It is not easy to suspect you," continued Volturio. "A man who has had a University education, and who fills a high-up niche in fashionable society, would naturally be very much averse to placing himself and his affairs in the hands of the C.I.D. He would feel that, however lightly he might be let off for giving away his pals, he would scarcely be let off altogether; and a single month — a day! — in prison, would ruin him and his position eternally. Such a man are you, Linegar. It is a point we have got to bear in mind."

"What about me?" cut in Brodie, whipping off his spectacles. "I haven't been in a penitentiary. I do not dine with dukes and duchesses."

"Very true," answered Volturio, sombrely. "And against you, Brodie, is the fact that you are a married man with kids. Your sort might well give way to a nervy panic which would send you round to New Scotland Yard. Nevertheless, I much doubt if you did this dog's trick. Next to Skarrs, you have the brains. Some of your flashes revealed the born crook. We all remember that, in that matter of the Evershed emeralds, you put your finger on a weak link and saved us from certain capture. No, I do not see why we should particularly suspect you, Brodie."

"I swear that I am straight," answered Brodie, with a rather husky laugh.

"We all swear that," grunted Williams.

"This has led us not an inch along the trail," said Linegar. "Unless ——" he paused.

"Unless what?" demanded Volturio.

"I suppose we mustn't include Skarrs in this inquiry?"

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"An idle question. The answer to it is the same as I used in my own defense: if Skarrs had betrayed us, he would have given no warning."

Williams spat out a shred of his cigar. "Then I fail to see ——"

"Quiet!" whispered Volturio, lifting a hand.

Each man stiffened to stone. A half-minute passed. Nothing happened.

"Did you hear anything?" said Brodie, pale as ashes.

"There is someone outside," answered Volturio, in a barely audible voice.

The whisper was scarcely out of his mouth when human knuckles rapped loudly upon the door, which Volturio had locked.

"Too late!" gasped Linegar. "We are trapped. The devil among us arranged it for tonight!"

The summons was repeated, harsh and imperative.

"The police!" panted Brodie, paler than ever. "Who'll go?"

"Keep your seats," warned Volturio, a flash passing over his eyes. "If that is the police, then the man we are seeking among ourselves will be the one who will want to open the door — that he may throw himself upon their protection. That won't do, by death! I'll choose." And his fierce, heated eyes glanced from one face to another.

The knocking became an uproar.

Volturio spoke. "You, Williams, open the door."

Williams drew a long, deep breath. He left his seat, turned the key in the lock, flung the door ajar.

Brodie burst into an hysterical laugh.

It was only the caretaker of the offices who stood outside.

"Beg your pardon, gents," he stammered. "I listened and heard nothing, and thought you had gone."

"All right, old son," answered Volturio.

"I'm filling the coal scuttles, gentlemen," said the caretaker, apologetically. "If you've finished with yours, I'll take it along with the rest."

"Do so. And leave it outside. We don't wish to be interrupted again."

The caretaker departed with the iron scoop, and Volturio locked the door again.

"False alarm," said he, grimly. "We will continue."

And he resumed his seat at the table.

Linegar, whose nerves were shaking, observed: "I should like to end this thing quickly. We can't remain here all night."

"We do not go until we have found our man and put him into the dark," said Volturio, steadily. "Patience. I feel in my bones that we shall get him."

"It looks like a dead end to me," said Williams, dejectedly.

"Think of a way out of it, then," answered Volturio. "Mine is not the only head present." He took up the blue-steel revolver and seemed to weigh it in the palm of his left hand. "I repeat — this pistol has got to shut

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the mouth of one of us tonight. I have the key of the door, and it remains in my possession."

"Possibly Skarrs may have jumped to a false conclusion?" was the next remark, which came from Brodie.

Instantly Volturio's eyes were upon him. "Just why do you harp on that?" he asked, coldly. "Is Skarrs the man to send us that message unless he *knew*?"

"No — no," faltered Brodie, who saw suspicion of him blazing in every face. "Of course he was certain. I take back my remark." And with a tremulous hand he wiped his spectacles.

Williams pushed back his chair savagely, and with thumbs in his armholes and chewing his cigar viciously, he began to walk up and down, up and down, trying to think out the terrible conundrum. Presently he came to a stop before the window, staring blankly at the pane, in which a dim image of his face seemed to hang, without a body, in the outside blackness. With a curse of impatience and irritation he threw up the lower sash to inhale a breath of cold air. He did not see Volturio half-rise; he did not hear Brodie's husky "Watch him!"

The rain made thunder in the dark — a steady roar which neither rose nor fell. Williams filled his chest; he laid his hands upon the sill and leaned out, peering into the well, which went down a hundred feet, and which, in that total gloom, seemed to drop a thousand. Feeling the rain upon his head, he drew back and took hold of the sash to jerk it down again; and at the same time he removed the butt of his cigar, as if with the intention of throwing it outside.

"Stop that!"

Volturio's voice, sharp and cutting as the lash of a heavy whip, made him start and wheel round as if a pistol-ball had hissed past his head. He saw glaring eyes fixed upon him; white and menacing faces; and at once he understood.

"All right," he said, swiftly but quietly. "You thought I was going to make some sort of signal? I can understand, but you are wrong. My cigar has been out for ten minutes. See for yourselves."

He laid the ragged butt upon the table for all to examine.

"Satisfied," snapped Volturio, and he swept the fragment into the fireplace. "Best keep your seat, Williams. You see what delicate ground we are on, and the least action may be open to suspicion."

At that moment they heard the shuffling footstep of the caretaker outside, and the clank of the coal scoop as he put it down in a corner.

Linegar burst out: "Oh, curse that fellow!" And then, as a thought struck him: "I suppose he is — *all right*, eh?"

"Be easy," answered Volturio. "I have satisfied myself on the point. He is what he seems — a caretaker."

Brodie, who had opened his mouth once or twice as if to speak, now exclaimed, stammeringly: "I should like to put forward a suggestion, if I can do so without prejudice to myself."

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"Let us have it, by all means," acquiesced Volturio.

"It is—" The speaker faltered, casting a furtive and a sombre eye upon the long pistol which Volturio was fingering. "I don't want to be misunderstood." He hesitated.

"Let us have your idea," repeated Volturio.

"Here it is, then," blurted Brodie. "As there seems but little chance of our spotting the spy in our midst, I suggest that he be offered a chance of grace; let us stipulate a time — a few minutes — for him to make up his mind to confess. Let us pledge our word that, if he admits his guilt, we will not kill him. We shall then at least know where we are, and means can be taken to keep him quiet until we have made ourselves safe."

"Bah! He will not believe us," scoffed Linegar.

"But we must do something!" exploded Williams. "It is easy to talk of sitting here indefinitely, but there comes a limit."

Volturio rolled his scowling eyes from one face to another. "You forget that we are here to deal out revenge," he replied, sullenly. "You talk of making ourselves safe, if this cursed business has not gone too far? For my part, I do not see how it is possible. The dog probably gave away our past; and if the police withold their hand for the present, it is because they want to take us red-handed in the scheme which we have just abandoned. Still, we will give your idea a chance, Brodie. I allow the man among us three minutes in which to admit it: and I promise that he shall at least leave this building alive, even if we kill him later on."

As Volturio spoke he put his watch upon the table.

"Three minutes," he repeated, "and not a second more."

The term of grace commenced. In the deep silence could be heard the ticking of the watch.

"One minute has gone," said Volturio, grimly.

No one dared to move, for fear that it might be interpreted as the beginning of a confession.

"Two minutes!"

The ticking seemed to become faster — louder —

"For God's sake let the fellow speak and end this!" cried Williams.

No one answered him. The silence became a torment.

"Three minutes! The time has expired," said Volturio.

He took up his watch and replaced it on the gold chain.

Linegar burst out hoarsely: "I say, this is becoming more than my nerves can stand. It is certain that the fellow will never be spotted, at least not while we sit here, because he knows that we have nothing to go upon."

"Absolutely nothing at all," answered Volturio, in a deep, menacing growl.

"Then how, in Heaven's name —?"

Suddenly everyone gave a violent start, which showed the tension that gripped them. It was caused by the abrupt trilling of the telephone-bell.

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Volturio was first from his chair. He left the revolver upon the table. He unclipped the receiver from its hook and placed it to his ear. He called into the instrument, answering someone: "Yes, yes." Then, for an instant, he averted his head to glance over his shoulder at the others.

"It's Skarrs," he rapped.

They all looked at him intently. He was speaking again into the 'phone. He called out, in an amazed voice: "*What?*" Then he dashed the receiver into its clips and spun round. His voice rang out like a clarion. "Skarrs has found out! He has told me the name!"

That triumphant, ringing cry was scarcely uttered when Williams hurled back his chair and grabbed the revolver from the table. He leaped away, screaming out an imprecation.

"Hands off!" he yelled. "By life and death, I'll shoot the first man who comes near me!"

Volturio's voice, calm and strong, boomed out: "Steady, everybody! Listen to me. It was not Skarrs speaking. It was my housekeeper. I had arranged for her to call me at the very minute she did. It was a trick, and it has won. There stands our spy."

Williams howled as if demented: "I don't care! I don't care! Keep away, or I'll shoot!"

Volturio uttered a laugh that was frightful. "Blaze away!" he mocked. "The revolver isn't loaded!"

The three men bore down upon Williams. There rose the sound of scuffling feet, of pants for breath, of the window being flung up, of a half-strangled cry for mercy, which was followed by a wild scream, and ended by the thud of a body on the stones a hundred feet below. . . .

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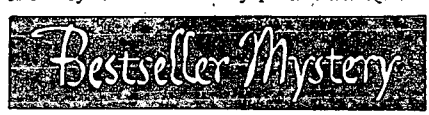

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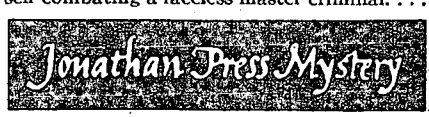

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